

# REMAINS

Ahmad Harb



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# Remains

A Novel

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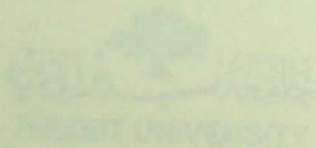
## *Remains*

AHMAD HARB was born in Al-Thahireyya in southern Palestine in 1951. His first novel was *The Returnee* (1982). Harb rejected the political preoccupations of the Palestinian contemporary fiction and criticized its lack of form. His novel, *The Other Side of the Promised Land* (1990) was intended as a demonstration of what the novel should be as its action still ongoing. He won the National Award for the novel in 1997. The best known of Harb's other novels is *Isma'il* (1986). *Remains* appeared first in Arabic in 1997.

Harb now lives in Ramallah and teaches at Birzeit University, Palestine.



*To my mother*



My mother's KINF\*! Why have I abandoned you all this time just hanging on the bars of my balcony window? I keep staring so closely at you, while puffing on my pipe, as if I were chasing fleeing memories. Memories that unearth nothing and shed light on nothing, but roam continuously in the regions of my mind where I ponder you and watch how you, like a spider's web, encircle my neck about to strangle me.

- "Why haven't you burned it?" he asked him when he first brought it on his shoulder fifteen years ago.

- "I really thought about that. In fact, I thought about burning it rather than suffering the burden of bringing it over here. But thinking that it might be of some use to you, I changed my mind. It is reminiscent of our heritage. My mother used to spend long hours staring at it. She used to say it was my present that Waheed refused to accept as a wedding gift. Why did he do that? Waheed, all that your father left belongs to you and your brother. Indeed, she always made us feel that this kinf should go to you.

In fact, Waheed's father had nothing to do with the kinf except that it was the present his grandmother, Haja Mahbouba, gave to his mother on her wedding.

There is no God but Allah  
 Mohammad is the messenger of Allah  
 Allah is our Creator and to Him we shall return,  
 Say: 'There is no God but Allah!'

These hymns softly echo in his memory. He can hear them accompanied by the clatter of Mahbouba's bones which he imagined were still residing in the kinf.

She was buried on a cold winter day. People of Al-Ein came from all directions to attend the funeral. She was known to them by her

long black rosary hanging down her neck and touching her knees, and her pipe with its half-a-meter reed. They came to see off a traveler who was so taken by the lashes of time that her body shrank and her face was wrinkled. They came with stories to tell. They came to read their future in her death as she read their future in her life. Or perhaps, it was the fearful moment of death that pulls the sinews of sad hearts together by its mere occurrence, but quickly fades away as each mourner turns his own way.

The men surrounded her coffin\* in the house yard. Some of them squatted, while others leaned against the wall waiting to carry the coffin to its final destination. The women also gathered inside, performing the usual rituals of washing and enshrouding the dead body. Waheed stood barefoot with his hair untidy in the middle of the women, watching one of them massaging his grandmother's face as if trying to smooth her wrinkles away. Wadee'a snuck and hid in the coffin. When they brought the body, she burst into tears. "Grandma, take me with you," the girl cried. For some time, we were trying to convince Wadee'a to leave the coffin and stop crying. "Your grandma loves you and she's just going on a short journey- just to her grave," we comforted the little girl.

The funeral moved slowly under intermittent rain showers. Men exchanged the duty of carrying the coffin on their shoulders. Mahbouba's coffin looked like a small boat moving on a quiet current to its one-way destination.

'Say there is no God but He,- the Living, the Self-Sustaining, the Eternal.' Now and then this supplication reminding the crowd of death was sent forth by one of the mourners.

He watched them from a distance laying the body down in a deep hole, while clasping Wadee'a's hand. The girl did not stop crying, and her tears mingled with the raindrops. She kept trying to free her hand to join her grandmother in the grave.

"Oh, my grandmother, how can your feeble body tolerate such a heavy burden of earth and stones? How can your proud soul tolerate being imprisoned deep into the earth? I can hear the clatter of your bones in this hanging kinf which evokes in my memory stories that have neither beginnings nor ends. Oh, my mother's kinf, where's Salah d-Din to protect me! Oh, my mother's kinf, my haven, haven't you got the remains of someone's bones?" Waheed was thinking.

The Israeli military authorities decided to release the remains of three Intifada martyrs as a sign of goodwill towards the Palestinians and to encourage their inclinations towards peace. One of the corpses was Majid Rayan's. The Israelis did not find anybody who could meet the requirements of receiving the corpse. Being very depressed, Majid's father passed away a few days after his son's death. Weeping sadly for a long time, his mother's eyesight grew weak. Blaming herself for his death, she went insane. The mother betrayed her son when she directed the Israelis to his hideout!

Indeed, she intended to save his life. She tried to convince him to leave his hideout in Wadi Al-Manal and surrender to the Israelis. 'Sooner or later you'll face your destiny, my son. Sooner or later the Palestinians will sober up again and the Intifada will come to an end,' she used to tell him. She promised to direct the Israelis to his hiding place, provided they would not kill him. She appealed to them not to kill her son. She begged them to put him in jail for life, but not to kill him. 'Son, I can no longer bear to hear mothers utter ululations when their sons fall martyrs. I have spared one ululation for your wedding day when you marry Wadee'a. But, alas, Wadee'a was mysteriously killed in the cave. You're everything to me. Your father is so burdened with worries and old age that he desires death every moment. Please, son, spare your life. A poor woman like me has the right to happiness, even for a moment. A prisoner will be free one day, but a martyr will never come back. I hate to see your picture posted on walls with other martyrs. It is still the picture of death, loss



and misery. One day on earth is worth a thousand underneath it,' the mother said to her son with tears running down her cheeks.

The Israelis broke their promise and maliciously killed Majid. They attacked him in his hideout and shot him dead before he could reach his weapon. They took his body in a convertible military jeep and drove along the roads of Al-Ein with his head dangling before the spectators. The village boiled with anger at the desecration of Majid's body, they asked in total disbelief, "Is it possible?- a mother betrays her son and causes his death!" As a sign of mourning, the mother took an oath not to take a bath for the rest of her life, thinking that by so doing she might atone for the sin that she did not intend to commit!

Waheed caught sight of the news about the release of the three martyrs' bodies in the *Free Opinion* newspaper while reading a report on a secret meeting between Hadi and a high-ranking Israeli official. He soon contacted one of the human rights societies which helped him get a permit to bury the remains of Majid's body with very strict conditions. Only he and the mayor could attend the funeral. They had to come to the Kfar Asyoun crossroad at 8 p.m., and the burial had to take place after midnight without any official ceremonies.

Waheed had to give in to their conditions. Accompanied by the Head of Al-Ein's Local Council, he drove to the place as scheduled by the Israeli forces. There, a military ambulance and two tanks were waiting. As soon as they arrived, three armed soldiers hurried to them. After they checked their papers, the soldiers ordered them to proceed to the ambulance. Two of the soldiers jumped inside the armored ambulance and pushed a wooden casket to the ground. Waheed and the Mayor easily carried the casket and tied it to the roof of their car. "I'm afraid the soldiers have tricked us. The coffin is as light as a butterfly," the Mayor remarked as he sat near Waheed in the car. "Is there anything in it except the remains of Majid's body?" Waheed wondered.

It was after 10 p.m. when they reached the Mayor's house. Checking the coffin, Waheed read a label attached to it 'Remains of Majid Rayan- a leader of Al-Ein's terrorists, killed in a military confrontation on November 25<sup>th</sup> 1989.' The note was written in Arabic and Hebrew.

The Mayor tried hard to convince Waheed to bury Majid's remains near the wall in the yard of the house or in the cave where he raised sheep, saying that he dreaded visiting cemeteries at night and insisted he would not go there.

"The dead scare me because their ghosts chase whoever approaches their graves at night," he said irritably.

"Is this how we honor a martyr?" Waheed protested. "Leave the matter to me and I'll take care of it. But I'll have to put the remains in another container so I can carry it in my car." As Waheed raised the casket lid, the Mayor fled to the other room. A pile of bones wrapped in cotton and put in a plastic sack bearing the same tag rested on the casket's floor. Despite the solemnity of the situation and the deep sorrow, Waheed summoned up his courage to closely look at the bones as he carried the sack. "Surely, these are not all the bones of a human being!" he mumbled. Then, he recalled the Mayor's words when they were carrying the casket to their car.

At midnight, Waheed was wandering in the graveyard in pitch darkness. No lights came from the settlement on the western side. Even stars shyly hid behind the racing clouds accompanied by disrupting gusts of fog. He turned the car lights on so he could see his way. An aura of overwhelming apprehension engulfed the place as he was looking for a space to bury Majid's remains in the land he cherished, and for which he sacrificed his life. Waheed was terrified. His hair stood up like nails hammering his whole body. Putting the sack near one of the graves, his trembling hands began to dig. Probably, that could be Wadee'a's grave, or Abu Qais's or Mahbouba's, his grandmother.

Although he attended all their funerals, he was unable to recognize whose grave was whose in the unrelenting darkness. He remembered how he leaned his head against a tree trunk and fell into a kind of trance when they brought Wadee'a's body for burial. The mourners left the place and forgot about him. It was midnight when he regained consciousness. He kept watching the mourners while they were laying down Mahbouba's body in the grave. He also remembered how tightly he clasped Wadee'a's hand when she was still a little girl, when they brought Abu Qais's coffin, his experience with death had already matured him.

It was the last days of Ramadan\* when Waheed was in Al-Ein. Abu Qais asked him to accompany him to the Ibrahimi Mosque (in Hebron) to commemorate the Night of Power\*. Abu Qais told him that on such holy days God responds to his servants. Waheed was not enthusiastic about going with Abu Qais. In fact, he was skeptical about what people believed about the holiness of Good Friday and the Night of Power. For a while, they argued over the importance of that Night in the Muslim Calender and its esoteric meaning in the Quran. "We have to get a proper grasp of its metaphorical meaning and not the literal meaning which most people believe in. It can't be true that Heaven opens up its gates to receive our complaints and pleadings. This has never happened in a recorded past that can be documented. However, had this been true, no Jew would have remained alive on this land, for we have been imploring God for so long to help us get rid of them," Waheed argued. With only a smile, Abu Qais responded, "Well, see you tomorrow".

And 'tomorrow' was Abu Qais's meeting with death. Waheed accompanied the car which carried the coffin from Alia Hospital after the Ibrahimi Mosque's massacre. The hospital courtyard was a real battlefield. Everything bore witness to the terrible crime. Waves of human beings flooded into the hospital courtyard ignoring the danger to their own lives from the Israeli soldiers who peppered the people with gunshots at the crossroads and from building roofs to

disperse them or to prevent them from arriving at the hospital. Blood pools lined the hospital street and as one climbed up toward the gate, the pools increased and became wider and wider. One had to roll up his trousers or hold up his dress or walk on his toes to avoid the blood until he reached the emergency room. The situation was so terrible that one would not wish the experience on his worst enemy, not even to wish the scene to haunt their nightmares. Full of sorrow, women were screaming and pulling out their hair. Their screams shook the hospital, and mixed with the noise of shelling and the sirens of ambulances with their red lights revolving like stars crying out in horror.

Waheed wondered how and who he could ask about Abu Qais. Everyone was in the same boat. People ran through the hospital halls and rushed at the appearance of every new dead body. Every time an ambulance appeared on the scene, they ran toward it. They asked one another. But there was no reply. Surely, scores of people were slain and hundreds injured. Everyone wanted to know how many were killed and injured. Even if their relative was not among them, people kept asking, for the disaster befell everyone. One felt each one of the victims was a son, a brother or a close friend. An eerie, desperate silence engulfed the place after the repeated pleas from the doctors and other officials who wanted to call out the victims' names. The noise of the shelling that disrupted the overwhelming silence continued so fiercely and stubbornly, further injuring the humanity of sorrow and pain. God! Tongues were held tight, chests were burdened, and destiny became clear.

#### Ibrahim al-Heifawi- Abu Qais

Waheed and a group of young men from Al-Ein could climb up the stairs. From among twenty other bodies that were laid along the corridor of the second floor, they recognized Abu Qais's body. Every body was wrapped with a blanket and the name tagged near the head. They carried the dead body on a stretcher and went out through a back door to avoid

the crowd at the front entrance. Waheed hid his rage and tried hard to pull himself together all the way to the village and after the funeral.

"O, Abu Qais, you are great yet dead while the others remain. You must have visited this place before going to the Ibrahimi Mosque. You must have whispered the password to the owl at the corner of your hut. You must have wished to say something to me because you wanted me to accompany you that night. Oh, how bitterly I regret it. You are great and I am the remains. Where is your pride in Al-Manal Valley? Where is the ball that rolled down to the bottom of the valley while you were counting the pebbles of truth? Wasn't it you who said that time is a ball wherever you put your finger is the axis point? You are now the axis point! Time has ceased on a pin's head for your sake. Tell me Abu Qais, how your feeble body received forty shots? The cause of death according to the doctors' report- forty explosive shots hit the head and the chest, Waheed silently lamented to himself.

Waheed surprised the mourners when he uncovered Abu Qais's face before the body was laid down in the grave.

"I want to see the man off," he insisted. The mourners tried hard to prevent him under the pretext that such a deed did not suit a martyr.

"Abu Qais left me a will," Waheed said.

"May God bless our souls, what's the matter with you? Have you gone mad?" they asked him.

"I want to see his face and read the will," Waheed insisted.

"Don't add salt to our injury. Don't violate our traditions. We've had enough!" they implored.

Waheed did not wait. He shoved them aside and removed the cover. What a terrible sight! He could not distinguish the head from the body. He knelt down and began to throw earth on his head and at other people's faces. Two mourners approached him and carried him away amidst the cries and consolations of other mourners. "May God help Waheed. This could drive anyone crazy," some of them said.

He felt the earth crying when the axe fell out of his hand. He felt

the other graves open, the tree tremble and a dazzling light emerge from its trunk. When Waheed was seven, his mother told him that martyrs visit the earth on the anniversaries of their death. "They come with the rays of the light, with the rustling of tree leaves, with the noises of animals, with the creeping of worms, with the rattling of spiders and with the yearnings of the thirsty land. The wise person, my son, is one who discerns the laws of nature. Ask your grandmother Mahbouba and she will tell you. She is the village seer and a descendant of Abu Dabbour's family."

In 1956, Mahbouba went to visit her only son who was a soldier in the Jordanian army. He was in a border police station near the truce borders between Israel and the West Bank to the south of Al-Ein. She took with her enough food to feed his nineteen fellow soldiers at the station. Round her neck was the black rosary she brought from Al-Hijaz when she visited the Prophet's shrine as a young woman. The pilgrimage lasted for a whole year during which she buried her husband in the desert after his heart attack. When she returned, she had that black rosary that hung down her neck and touched her knees, a bottle of zamzam\* water and her husband's pipe. "Clearly, Hajja Mahbouba has become a saint. Like father like son," the townspeople said when they welcomed her back. This saying was based on their firm belief that the lady descended from Imam Abu Kharouba's family. The shrine near the graveyard was named after him.

No one knows how the name Abu Kharouba was changed into Abu Dabour\*. It is said that the name Abu Dabour originally refers to the Palestinian town, Dabouria. The Imam, some believe, immigrated from there to Al-Ein in the late eighteenth century. A month after his death, a locust tree grew near the tomb. The townspeople said that the tree was a sign of holiness and hence built a shrine around the tomb. They also planted olive trees all around the shrine. All the trees perished except for the olive tree that still shades the place. The locust tree disappeared, only its name survived. In an-

other story, it is said that Abu Dabour never immigrated but he was originally from Al-Ein and the name was conferred upon him because he was so pious and brave. Like a wasp, he could sting whenever he told the truth. When they saw her smoking the pipe, Mahbouba told her townspeople that the pipe was her only inheritance from her husband whom she buried in the desert during their pilgrimage.

Mahbouba reached the police station at sunset. She offered her son and his fellow soldiers the food. After a short rest, the soldiers formed a semi circle and began to dance the dabka\*. One of them played the flute and another sang:

Jafa is our city  
 In it we grew  
 We planted flowers round its brooklets  
 King Hussein will come tomorrow  
 To relieve our Palestine from oppression  
 We have for long lived in diaspora  
 May God hear our cry  
 May God hear our invocation  
 And to the King we'll sing dal'ouna\*

Mahbouba recalled that the singing and dancing continued all night long. Later at dawn, she went near a bower to do her ablution for the dawn prayer. As she closed the bower door, she sensed something serious happening. The Israeli forces attacked the place. From her hiding place, she could hear the screams calling for help. A short period of silence ensued and suddenly the noise of a loud explosion shook the Hebron Valley. Immensely terrified, people in Al-Ein woke up, and they intuitively knew that 'the Jews had exploded Al-Rahwa Police Station. Consequently, many people gathered in the schoolyard carrying sticks, axes and some 'old-fashioned' guns. "Surely, our sons were killed," some said. They were scared to death, and wondered what to do. Some of them enthusiastically asked Abu-Arafat, the bus driver, to take them to the battlefield through the only possible

road between Al-Ein and Bir Sheba. This road was closed after the signing of the 1948 truce agreement between Israel and Jordan, and is a long road winding down to a steep valley. It is said that Prophet Abraham took shelter in this valley which he craftily confiscated from its original owners.

"I want a piece of land as big as a bull's skin to live on. Wouldn't you be kind enough to offer it to me?" Abraham cunningly requested. "You'll have what you need," the townspeople said, motivated by their genuine sense of generosity. They naively thought that Abraham really meant that he really wanted a piece of land as big as a bull's skin to set up his tent. Abraham's intent was contrary to theirs. He skinned the bull and began to make thin belts out of its skin which he then used to surround the area from the Ibrahimi Mosque in the north to Iraq Al-Abraq in the south, which formed the natural border between the valley, later named after him, and Al-Nagav Plain that lies behind the truce borders. It is also known as Tour where the first meeting between Abraham and his hosts took place. It was called Al-Abraq after the bull. The place was 2 km. from Al-Rahwa Police Station.

Abu Arafat warned that the road was planted with mines and that the Israeli army must have ambushes scattered in different places, especially in caves adjacent to the road bends. Judging from his past experience in fighting the Israelis, he warned that no one would return home alive if they stubbornly insisted on using that road. His warnings fell on deaf ears, so he resorted to trickery. He ran the bus into the mountain's foot at the edge of the valley. Consequently, no one dared to go through the road until a Jordanian captain with a group of bedouin soldiers arrived at the place. The captain was from At-Tafila, and he was so admired by the townspeople that they gave him one of their daughters in marriage as his second wife. He was always on the alert waiting for the right moment to fight the Israelis. He addressed the crowd to tell them that he would go alone in his convertible jeep to scout the road, and they should have to wait till he



sent them a wireless signal. So they waited till afternoon, but they received nothing from the captain. They knew nothing about what had happened till the Radio Voice of Israel announced in Arabic, "the Israeli military forces successfully aborted an attempt to infiltrate into their land from the Jordanian territory near Al-Ein. The Israeli force, pulled back without any casualties on its part."

All the townspeople, men, women and children together with the Jordanian national guard forces rushed down into the valley to search for the officer. They found his car capsized and pierced with bullets from all sides. They followed the traces of the car wheels. At about 100 m. along the road, they found the officer's body stuck between two huge rocks near one side of the road. They wrapped the body in a blanket and a military car carried it to the police station. No one single barrack remained in its place except for the bower where Mahbouba was still hiding.

She narrated to them the horifying story she had witnessed personally. She said, "the Israelis captured the Arab soldiers and then slaughtered them with knives, for no shots were heard. She could distinguish the cry of every single soldier when his turn was due. "Yamma, yamma\*," was the only cry of help begging for their lives. Intuitively, she could recognize the identity of the caller. The Israelis exploded the site after murdering all the soldiers." When the enemy forces withdrew, Mahbouba helped to search for the remains of mutilated bodies on the hills, in the plains, and down the slopes. She and other people found part of an arm or a leg here and there. The only hand they could recognize was her son's, Salim, right hand. They knew it because his engagement ring was still on his finger. The single hand was buried, and that was the only funeral!

The scene is still engraved in Waheed's memory while he tried to bury Majid's remains; the seven-year-old child, looking askance at a human hand wrapped in a blanket and buried alone separated from the body. He asked his mother where the body had gone. She an-

swered, "It has flown to heaven." Mahbouba confirmed this belief which all townspeople believed. Every anniversary, Mahbouba used to spend the night in the bower alone and the next morning she went back to the town, narrating her experience. "I saw men dancing like angels in a circle of light and gradually going high to the sky, while the stones were calling, come back, come back!"

O, God, everyone in the town believed Mabbouba! They thought that her miraculous survival that night was a sign of her prophethood, and her name was a sign of her blessing. She was Mahbouba, the daughter of Abu Dabour, who could see through the complete darkness to the hidden light of the invisible.

"Could you save him now, Mahbouba?" With his axe, he woke up the guests of the graveyard. He imagined them shouting at him, "Why are you profaning our world. Let us rest in our eternal sleep, living the way we wish." He heard their shouts emerging from the graves through the light. His knees struck each other, and he was about to fall down. At the apex of his fear, he carried the sack of Majid's remains and took to his heels.

The night spread its veils over the sea of sky, and darkness lazily let its arms hang down over Ramallah-Nablus Road like a decrepit tiger. He and I were sitting in front of my mother's kinf in the balcony opposite a tall building which was confiscated by the Israeli army. The soldiers used its roof as a surveillance center. The Electricity went out at noon during the lecture in the basement of the Ramiz and Kharaz Building in the city center of Ramallah. He and his students used their lighters and matches to find their way out of the place. At seven p.m., his world had no light that could defy the ferocity of darkness except for the torches and wax candles that were trembling in people's hands in the neighboring houses. Now and then a dazzling light came from the roof of the opposite building. The soldiers focused the light at the glass window on the balcony, and like lightning, the light vanished. Consequently, the place got darker and darker, or at least this was what their eyes usually felt when suddenly exposed to such a dazzling light.

Shurouq approached with a candle in her hand.

"Where is my birthday's present?" she complained. "You've forgotten it, eh? O.K. next time," she added.

"No, I haven't forgotten. Tomorrow morning we'll go before the shooting starts and buy you what you want," he promised.

"Every time I ask something you say tomorrow...tomorrow. Dad, how long do I still have to live?" the girl wondered.

How strange it was for a girl of twelve years to raise such a question!

She did not know what had happened. It was a day attired in black despite the nude December sun which rose in the middle of the sky contrary to its usual custom. He carried his bag and headed towards the Ramiz and Kharaz Building. 'Underground Education' was the motto advocated by the Council of Higher Education to counteract

the Israeli authorities' policy which closed the Palestinian universities, higher institutes and schools. Indeed, it was underground education in the full sense of the word. One had to go down twenty one steps to reach the spacious room in the basement. The room had no windows, and only the ghosts of the graveyard struck ones' memory. Before the Intifada, the room was used as a banana brewery. Birzeit University could not find a better place to hide from the Israeli authorities which often deprived students and teachers of carrying books or notebooks. The university did not expect that the occupation authorities would suspect that anybody could ever get any kind of education between the two wide holes around the building that laid between heaps of garbage and waste material from nearby buildings.

An ominous building! This is how the city people described it. Before the arrival of the National Authority, it used to be the tallest building in the whole city. In the back of people's minds, the place was associated with three similar suicides. In each case, the person sneaked into the building from the back stairs and threw himself/herself down into one of the two holes. The first time, it was a young man in his twenties. His mother, who hated her sister, refused to let him marry his cousin whom he loved. The second and the third time, two wives of a young man from the city committed suicide. First, it was his foreign wife whom he married after finishing his studies in Europe. People claimed the European women could not tolerate the restrictions of an Arab society as she was used to living in an open society where she could freely court other men. And when his Arab wife did the same, tongues were tied in their mouths, and no justification was given. The death of the second wife remained a riddle until a women's society looked into the case and condemned the husband. The society filed a case against the man in the religious court pleading that he, despite his higher education, mistreated women and should not therefore be allowed to marry a third wife. Deeming it a silly and a rather strange case, the court rejected it as the man had already gotten married for the third time before any hearing took place. In an article published in the *Free Opinion* news-

paper, the society wrote, "Oh, men...see what has befallen us. Even the name of the building mirrors our situation. The motto, 'the revolution has trodden this path', which was written by the Intifada young men in black at midnight only intersected with the last letter of 'Kharaz.'"

"T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*," he began his lecture, "is the poem of free verse and broken images. It's the poem of death by water and fire that makes night much darker and thunder that brings no rain and human bodies implanted amidst holes and rocks. It's the poem of the land which gods of fertility have deserted, that death has become the only god".

"Where's Hajja Mahbouba in the poem?" Waheed surprised his students with the question as he suddenly paused absentmindedly.

"Who's Hajja Mahbouba, sir?" the students wondered. "Eliot was neither an Arab nor a Muslim, so where on earth have you found the name of 'Mahbouba'? The poem talks about the valley of ashes and the gods of fertility who deserted the land, and the remains of human bones driven aimlessly by the River Thames in its reversed flow."

"So Mahbouba was in the poem," he explained.

"Sir, you look tired. Why don't you put off the lecture till later!" the students suggested.

"Please, sir...don't continue the class today," one of his female students begged. "Last night, I had a frightening dream. I was standing at the edge of a deep valley whose bottom I could not see through darkness. I was so scared that I trembled and my feet slipped, and I began screaming as I was falling down in the abyss. I was sweating all over, and my mother was drying my forehead when she woke me up." "May God bless you!" my mother whispered.

The rest of the class burst into laughter, and few irritating remarks came from the other students. There is something wrong in today's class. The teacher is looking for Mahbouba in 'The Wasteland'. It could be the typist. Halima was dreaming all the time. Certainly, the atmosphere of the room has a great influence. It was like a tomb and anyone taking class in it is like one sleeping among graves, inevitably he would have nightmares.

"What are you laughing at?" Halima protested with tearful eyes. "Do you know what has happened to me? Honest to God, I want nothing but to see Tel Aviv set ablaze and swim in a sea of blood and to see the Jews seeking our help and mercy. I wish Tel Aviv were razed to ground so the Israelis could realize how much we have suffered because of them and that we are human beings just like them," she added.

"Why all this hatred?" the teacher interrupted.

"Do you call this hatred?" the student asked. "If they killed your son or brother as they killed my brother you wouldn't call it hatred. They kidnapped my twelve-year-old brother at the checkpoint on his way back home from another prison. We got a dead body without a head from Abu Kbir Hospital," Halima tearfully explained.

Bursting into tears, the girl could not continue her story. Her eyes got redder and her hands contracted, and she collapsed in her seat.

The news about the boy's murder was released by the newspapers last week. As usual, the Israeli military communiqué tried to accuse some masked Palestinians for killing the child, but eyewitnesses proved the opposite. Till the day of his kidnapping, the boy had been detained in Al-Far'a Camp Prison for three months. When he was first arrested, the military officers thought that the boy's physical build and mental abilities did not indicate his real age. When he was released, a military car carried him blindfolded and threw him near Anabta. He uncovered his eyes, but he did not realize the place. He drifted till he came face to face with an Israeli checkpoint at the entrance of the town. Some people saw the army handcuffing the boy, blindfold him again and pushed him into a military car which sped as fast as a bullet.

The teacher had not known then that the boy was a relative of one of his students. Every day martyrs fell and their stories were published in newspapers or circulated by people. Spontaneously, he muttered a few innocent words of condolence, and asked his students to help their classmate. At that time, the lights went out, and he was saved by the onrush of darkness.

And here we are. He and I are still sitting in the balcony, strangled

by darkness and dazzled by the soldiers' spotlights, which increased the layers of darkness. "Don't panic Shurouq. I'll buy you a birthday's present. What kind of present do you want?" A bouquet of flowers? Oh, yes. I'll buy you the flowers, if not today, I'll get them tomorrow. Every day is your birthday. Believe me I've tried my best. I left the lecture hall at Ramiz and Kharaz and went to the flower shop. The young men had a confrontation with the military forces and the Manara Turning soon became a battlefield. The smoke of burnt tires and tear gas cannisters mixed in suffocating clouds. The soldiers began to fire at the young men who hurled stones at them. I rushed to rescue a wounded young man who fell down. Some women helped me carry him and we ran to the hospital. His wound was serious. We thought he died on the spot. Some soldiers chased us and forced us to drop him on the sidewalk." "Isn't it enough that you've killed him," the women shouted at the soldiers. The soldiers insisted on seeing the young man's identity card. We tried to pull the young man and the soldiers pulled him back. "He is dead. What do you want of him?" we shouted. "Plant him in the asphalt," the soldiers cynically answered.

But fear no more, my daughter, they planted death in our streets.

"Fear no more the heat of the sun,

Nor the furious winter's rages.

Thou thy worldly task hast done,

Home art gone and taken thy wages.

Golden lads and girls all must,

As chimney-sweepers, come to dust

Fear no more the lightning of lush"

Nor the floods of Euphrates, censure rash. He mumbled fragments of Shakespearean lines.

"You're talking poetry, Waheed. Have you forgotten you're talking to your daughter?" his friend inquired in astonishment.

"A moment of intoxication! O, my friend who accompanies me like my shadow. What shall I say to you? We've grown up with death as we have grown in our skin. My friend, the world has unlaced its whip and it will certainly lash our naked backs. When darkness murmurs to my ears, I see my mother's kinf hung on the window of my balcony, hearing in it, Mahbouba's bones whispering to Majid's. A window overlooking a dark past opens up, allowing the whole universe to enter," Waheed replied.

"Do you mean our mother's kinf?"

"If we had the same mother."

Nonsense!"

"Do you remember what she said to us while trying to convince us to take it as a present? 'Son, may God bless you, this kinf is like a blue bead which guards you against envy and keeps Satan away from you. It has Mahbouba's blessings!'"

We laughed and got angry at her for giving us a present made of sheep wool!

"O, mother! I'm the remains of the remains of your sons. How can you give me a kinf as a present on my wedding! How long have you been waiting for this day while shedding tears on the past days and on those who perished or exiled? And you give me as a present the kinf my father used to keep seeds in and carry on his shoulder while plowing the earth. With each 'ho-cry' at his oxen, he dropped corn seeds into the wide-open furrows. Hence my father called it the kinf of lining. Isn't that true, mother?"

"Yes, son. Your father used it for sowing seeds because he thought it would bring him good omen. His were good days. We used to fill the silos with crops, and the people and animals were happy."

"I've thought you'll give me as a present some of your jewelry to



help me begin my new life."

"Your father took it all and bought the piece of land called Um Sidra. You know son, I wouldn't keep anything from you but I can only afford this kinf."

He did not know what to do with it, so he hung it on the window of his balcony as something from the past, from his cultural heritage. He envisaged it like a piece of traditional art or a painting portraying a dear person to whom he felt loyal. Then he remembered that the kinf had another practical benefit. He used it to keep some personal things in, letters or secret things he wanted to keep away from other people's reach, or some scraps of paper on which he wrote some notes he wanted to forget. When the Madrid peace conference was held, interest in Palestinian heritage increased and he found a reason for boasting about him being a pioneer in this field. His friend, Hadi, did not like the idea. "You're boasting about your mother's kinf as if it were Gogoul's coat or a peep show. Yesterday, I was invited to dinner by the American Consul and his house has more pieces of Palestinian art than any Palestinian house does. Listen, Waheed. We've lost Palestine, but we'll not lose its heritage. So, I'm commissioned by some high-ranking Palestinian officials to establish a center for Palestinian heritage and your kinf will be its first contents," Hadi enthusiastically promised.

Nothing has value between silence and the future. Between overflowing memories and expected salvation, worry, anticipation and tension gather in the silence of night. They embrace in darkness and shatter the moment of revival which may come with dawn. He cannot sleep. He sits on the couch on the balcony, one hand holds the pipe and the other trifles with his hair. His eyes aimlessly look for some lost memory in his mother's kinf. Oh, my mother's kinf, haven't you got some remaining bones?

Suddenly, electricity comes on and the light fills all the rooms of the house. The electrical appliances, which were off, have come back to life. The sound of the television and the radio are heard again. A deafening whistle is heard. He rushes to the bedroom to wake his wife. Shorouq receives him while rubbing her eyes to fight the dazzling light. "Have you bought me the flowers, dad?" She innocently asks. He takes no notice of the girl. "Leave behind all the differences between us and wake up!" he shouts at his wife.

"Nothing is wrong. Just this pipe causes problems for us. I'll solve the problem in due time. Wake up. The world has unlaced its whip. On whom will it fall this time? It's about to fall...it's about to fall...it has fallen on my naked back," he cries.

His wife does not respond. He rushes to the outer door and stands on the stairs. The cool and refreshing air touches his face with tense and gloomy waves. He does not know what to do in his loneliness. Any movement he makes may draw the attention of the soldiers on the opposite building. He is about to cry to wake the people of the neighborhood. Unconsciously, he goes down to the street. He lifts a stone and stares at the telephone post. He expects the neighbors to rush to the street to rescue him. Imagining some figures moving on the roof of the opposite building, he lets the stone fall out of his hand. He then goes inside and stands on the stairs. "Horror, horror,"

he hears it in the barking of dogs, in the braying of donkeys, in the squeaking of night and in the crazy shouting of patrols. "Come out inside\*!" one of the soldiers shouts at him through a loudspeaker when he sees him standing in front of the house.

"Come out inside!" and swallow your pride, the whip has fallen on your naked back. The world has turned its back to you. Your wife has deprived you of her warm bosom. Hadi is climbing the stairs with fervent steps. Majid's bones recall the memory of the dead. Abu Qais has left you no secret. Iman has lost faith. Mohammad removes the dust of death off himself. Wadee'a points the fingers of accusation at your eyes. Your daughter urges you to celebrate the onset of life. And you stand helpless, chewing dirty air. What's remained for you? The remains of bones or the remains of wreckage rattling in your mother's worn-out kinf! Oh, Salahu-Deen, aren't there any bones left in your lair?!

And here we are sitting on the balcony on a day which is worth a thousand days. A sense of emptiness fills the heart of life. I imagine the street crying. No children play with their balls or blow their whistles. Many a time he has shouted at them to go away so he could enjoy some peace and quiet. He used to shut his window to avoid their yelling and songs. "Bum, bum...Shamir go to hell...bum, bum...Arafat, sugar still...bum, bum," they used to cry. Now, he wishes they would come back. The city is surrendering, kneeling down to a golden calf while he is gazing at his mother's kinf. From the heart of darkness a familiar voice calls him, "Honest to God, son, I gave birth to you in a stifling summer day at the harvest time. Your father and I were reaping in Um Sidra, the only land we had after the Jews had usurped all the land in 1948. Your father bought this field from a bedouine called Rasheed who tricked your father and made him pay the price of the land three times until we were penniless, and I lost my Ottoman gold. Your father was very naive. While I was in labor under the lotus tree, I cried at him, but he didn't hear me and continued to reap and sing. Then, I called a bedouine shepherdess

who helped me deliver. "Amena, say peace be upon the Prophet. You've got a baby-boy. He's well-built and has a long tail."

What will you name him?" asked the bedouine woman.

"Waheed."

"May God bless him. Why don't you call him Mohammad after the Prophet? You're Amena and he is Mohmmad." The bedouine woman suggested.

"All names are blessed."

While his mother was still twisting from pain, his father was absorbed in his singing:

O, lass say good morning  
The dew fills the orchards.

"He must have been a lover or a poet in his youth. Which lady is he singing for?" the bedouine woman asked.

"He was neither a lover nor a poet. This is the only song he knows. There was neither dew nor orchards. It was a boiling day and there was nothing but the lotus tree standing alone in the middle of the field like Eve's tree before her temptation by Satan."

The bedouine woman wrapped the newly-born baby in a piece of canvas. She tightly tied a cloth belt round the mother's waist. My mother asked the bedouine to go and tell her mother Mahboubba about the baby. Mahboubba became angry when she saw the baby wrapped in a piece of canvas that stuck to his tender flesh. She said the baby was really lucky to survive, for the stifling weather and the rough piece of canvas could have killed it before reaching home. In front of other women from the neighborhood, Mahboubba cut off the umbilical cord. She asked the bedouine woman to hide the cord on a shelf in al-Khawaja's shop so the baby would become rich like him when he

grew up. The next day, the bedouine woman came to make sure the cord was still in its place but she found no remains of it. The mice must have eaten it. "Swear to God, Amena, your son will grow poor," Mahbouba said when she knew what happened to the cord. "But he will be a lover who will cause as much pain to women's hearts as they will to his," Mahbouba continued. Because his father did not attend his birth, the baby was called Waheed Amena.

He was known by his classmates and friends at school as Waheed Amena till the Israelis occupied Al-Ein in 1967. "Write 'raas' (head) and don't join the 'alif (the letter A) with the 'r'," the Arabic elementary teacher ordered Waheed while shaking his stick threateningly. The piece of chalk slipped off the chalkboard and once again the 'alif' joined the 'r'. The teacher lashed him with the stick. "O, donkey, clean the board and write it again." The little boy felt his bottom where the stick fell, and with a shaking hand he tried but the 'alif' insisted on joining the 'r'. Once again the stick fell on his bottom, and the boy jumped out of pain. Terrified, he felt some warm water running down his legs. Small streams of water formed on the floor tiles.

"Watch out, Waheed Amena wet his pants," his classmates mockingly roared.

"Watch out, you, stupid," some of them shouted.

"I swear to tell Amena," the boy threatened.

This incident was so notoriously remembered by Al-Ein townspeople. They used to say the Jews exploded Al-Rahwa Police Station in the same year when Waheed peed his pants. His grandmother asked him to accompany her to the station and spend the night with his uncle. Being unable to stay away from him, his mother suggested the child was too young to tolerate the hard journey.

He was known by his nickname until Israel conducted the first census in Al-Ein. Summoned by the Israeli military, he and his father went to the headquarters of the military governor at Al-Amara\*. They

were received by an Israeli official who spoke Arabic with an Egyptian dialect. The official asked the father about his first name and his surname.

"Saqr Al-Hroub,\*" the father answered.

"What kind of name is this? Saqr al-Hroub. That name is not allowed. We're in time of peace. Find another name," the official remarked.

Thinking for a moment, the father suggested, "Masaalmeh... Saqr Masaalmeh." Waheed wondered how the name struck his father's mind so suddenly unless the name was after the Masaalmeh bedouines who set up their tents on both sides of the truce borderline. Afterwards, the people of Al-Ein called them Masaalmeh Arabs. When his father got his Israeli ID, the 'h' was dropped from the name. He did not bother about that and from then on, he was known as 'Waheed Msaalem'.

Forty years later, Hadi confirmed Hajja Mahboub's prophecy.

"Why do you want to be poor?" Hadi asked. "Poverty is not something destined. Let's establish the Palestinian Heritage House," he suggested.

"What about the bridge center?" Waheed inquired.

"Every period has its names. Do you want to eat grapes or to fight the warden?" Hadi asked.

"I want grapes, but not dishonestly- without the warden's knowledge," Waheed replied.

"So you'll continue to be poor. My friend, the line between richness and poverty is a thin hair of conscience. Don't think I'm a bad guy. We live in a world of sharks and I'm trying to find a place for me in it. I seek recognition for my struggle for our cause, and I seek recognition for my name in a society that respects only money and high titles. Tell me, which one of those sharks feeding in the sea of "the cause" has struggled more than I have? As a Jordanian soldier, I participated in the June War. Truly, we were conquered, but I struggled. As a communist, I had my own viewpoint. If I had the power then, I would have sought peace with the Israelis. When Ismael

launched his revolution, I joined the National Front. I even hid Ismael the night he escaped to Amman. I also struggled by writing in the Free Opinion newspaper. I endured disgrace when I was condemned for marrying a Jewish lady, and I put up with it. I established the bridge office to influence the Israeli public. Before the Madrid Conference, I met with Shamir. Then I went to Egypt and met Osama Al-Baz who suggested that I establish a 'body' like what is called 'villages league' but with a national face. I liked the idea and I began setting plans to establish the Palestinian Heritage House. So, who struggled more than I did? Sylvia, the owner of the Free Opinion? I bet she doesn't know the difference between a village and a camp! She snubs me for being from Al-Ein Camp. Notice her French dialect when she pronounces the name of the camp. It's a mixture of French and the remains of her Palestinian urban-dialect. Yet I know how to make her fall in love with me just like the fly that falls into a spider's web. Who has the right? Sylvia or I? Don't talk to me about conscience; conscience, these days is like the godliness of the God-fearing it brings more misery to the miserables," Hadi explained.

He remembered his friend's words after that meeting and wrote them down on a scrap of paper which he put in his mother's kinf. "Money is the sticky ladder between the bottom and the top. You begin down at the bottom and dream to reach the top one day. At the bottom, you can see a crowd of climbers. Each is trying and each is waiting and each is wishful. When you start the climb, they clap their hands because they know you can make it and hope and wish that you will pull them up when you get to the top. They clap because they can't find another person to trust. Perhaps, they know nothing but clapping. They belong to nowhere. When the dark falls, and they find no one to clap for, they fall down on their bottoms like hyenas during the mating season."

"This doesn't apply to me. Only one step and I'll be on the top. Yes, I now know...all the threads intertwine with the those of my

mother's kin. Its fringes are like the spider's threads, fragile but murderous. Gentlemen, I'm now gathering the remains of the other side of the promised land in my memory- regions full of black destruction."

"Only Sylvia stands between me and the last step," Hadi said.

"What about Iman?" Waheed asked.

"She's no more than a mere step up the ladder."

"And Sa'ida, your sister?"

"Another step."

"But Sa'ida died."

"Sylvia killed her."

"Come on Hadi, you have to confess that your sister died of a stroke."

"Sylvia was the cause. She objected to Sa'ida's marriage to her brother. She put on a mourning dress on the wedding day and asked people to come to the mourning house to offer their condolences. "Oh, Irsan, you'll marry a woman from Al-Ein Camp," Sylvia protested."

"Who introduced your sister to Irsan?"

"They were classmates, and they worked together in the same office of the Free Opinion newspaper. You see, Sylvia stood between my sister and the sun."

"She intercepted your last step," Waheed commented.



Infatuation with vindication is a common disease among those who have an uneasy conscience and keep seeking some philosophical consolation for their deeds. This hypomania leads to weird patterns of thinking. In Hadi's case, the disease has led to an avalanche of presentiments, predictions, hypothesis and evaluations, all flowing into one opinion pressing hard against the walls of his consciousness like the pressure of water when a dam is about to collapse. He says this is politics- a bunch of discrepancies whereas the politician has a thick skin viewing time as a cucumber one day in your mouth and the other day in your ass. In the final analysis, it continues to be a cucumber, no matter which hole it seals, for the biological relation between the two holes remains the same.

"The problem, Hadi, is that some men inherently inflict destruction upon themselves. They have no logic, so any logical endeavor to convince them is a sheer waste of time. Their skins have grown so thick that they have become very dull, and they no longer feel. And I have been trying to bridge the gap between silence and nothingness where yellow, red and green lights tremble in the dark and repeat themselves. A voice from the heart of darkness which I recognize well calls upon me. "I'm lonely," Iman shouts. With her shouts, borders have disappeared, and life takes its old form. "Motives of enmity must disappear, peace must prevail. We have to change this world."

Today, Hadi is happy without her. No longer does he care about her call or beauty. "Selfish! This is what you are, men." She put her hand on her knees and her wedding ring slipped off her finger. She looked thin. She had suffered a lot and no one gave heed to her complaints.

"Rescue me," she begged Waheed.

"What can I do for you?" Waheed wondered.

"Your friend, Hadi, doesn't come home. He has left me suspended

between Jews and Muslims, between Palestine and Israel. I'm burning with the fire of jealousy and lust. Talk to him."

"I have several times, but he doesn't listen. Hadi is like a stubborn fly that follows the corpse to the tomb."

"Has he married Sylvia?"

"I don't think so."

"I've been told they've got married in the Philadelphia Hotel in Amman."

"Don't believe it. Their relation is based on business and self-interest. Each means to destroy the other. He is trying to combine 'press' with 'culture' and she is trying to combine 'culture' with 'press.'"

"He is infatuated with Sylvia."

"Sylvia won't marry Hadi. Nor will he. Sylvia, who wore a mourning dress on her brother's marriage to Sa'ida, she won't marry Hadi."

"So what's the solution?"

"I've always advised you to go back to your parents."

"Listen, I can't. They'll kill me."

"I've heard that a pious Jew from Kiryat Arba by the name of Abraham Abino has changed his house into a rehabilitation center for Jewish women who married Palestinians. He also heads a movement that kidnaps them and forces them to readopt their Jewish religion. Why don't you call him?"

"Abraham Abino," she surprisingly repeated the name. "Abraham Abino, I know the man. He's the one who with other Israeli intelligence men were tracing me in Al-Ein village. He is the one who kidnapped me the first time. How can I call him now? Abraham Abino!" she wondered.

Words failed her. And after a while she sighed deeply and pleaded, "God is the mightiest. My deliverance lies in your hand- marry me."

Surprised by her proposal, he struttered, "You're already married to Hadi."

"I'll divorce him. I'll go to the same Sheikh who married us and ask him to grant us a divorce."

"But I'm already married."

"I'll be your second wife."

"I'm a man who loves solitude and freedom, and marriage is the opposite of both."

"Yet, you've got married," she said.

"It's my first and last mistake."

"What I want is a marriage certificate to help me continue the project I started with Hadi. You're the only person I trust. And the situation won't stay like this for long because you, Arabs, are always skeptical about a woman in my condition."

"The problem with marriage is that it is registered in a 'certificate'; that's why it's a marriage."

He was not prepared for her proposal. So he kept trying to avoid embarrassment by being ironic sometimes. Certainly, he is not a polygamist. He loves women and they usually found him attractive. 'I love her and she loves me as my camel loves her she-camel', a line of verse which he could not remember who said it, but the Arabic teacher imprinted it in the minds of his tenth-grade students as he fondly repeated it. If he taught Arabic love poetry or rules of prosody or desinential inflection, he would mention that line as example. The students learned it by heart and used it as a morning greeting motto to mock the teacher's shallowness. The teacher would look at them with a forced smile and say, "You devils!"

"Admiration...caring...amorous looks...sweet smiles...arrows of love...all this is fine, but taking a second wife, I swear to Allah, has never occurred to me."

"How sweet the smell of the burning tobacco!" she used to say when she invited him to have a coffee with her.

"How strange you are, women! My wife hates the smell of tobacco and rushes to her bedroom as soon as I put the pipe in my mouth, but you love it."

"I adore it," she seductively responded.

Here we are. He and I are sitting on the balcony before my mother's kinf. Some stars are swimming in the sea of sky, and I sip your warmth from the chilly evening, and let darkness shine with splendor. Where are you Mahmoud Maw'id. Your town, Al-Ein, is no longer a Palestinian one. If you live long, you will meet its windflowers from behind a glass screen.

"Once upon a time, in a town, on a sidewalk, in a street, I met the windflowers."

Thirty years after travelling on endless paths, I met the flowers of my childhood.

But alas, it was imprisoned behind a glass wall...passers-by look at it ...an object in a public sale...led to silent dining tables in closed rooms that had never seen the sun.

The child within me has woken up. It has opened its eyes, and it has started to run after Aisha's plaits in boundless flowers fields. Red...white...violet...intoxicated by the morning dew.

The child within me has stopped in a Palestinian village. In vain, he looks at the gloomy horizons for the emergence of Aisha's smile. He has grown old plodding through a city street.

Because the flowers are no more free...

Because his village is no more Palestinian...

Because Aisha is lost in the paths of exiles...

And because later, he is no longer a child...

He has hid his face from the eyes of imprisoned flowers...

He has hid his heart from the pleas of imprisoned flowers...

In a street...in a city...he looks for his voice which, one day, lost its way!

Al-Ein...what is left from Al-Ein whose windflowers you saw from behind a glass screen in Paris, Mahmoud? Al-Ein is beautiful and dear and you

cannot imagine the world without it. Some believe its beauty is due to its location- between Bir Sheba and Hebron where the main road splits it into two equal halves; some believe that its clear sky in summer and its clear full moon and twinkling stars echoed love before the days had names; some can read in its recesses the nature of self in joy and sadness; and some...

Oh, windflowers...Aisha's smile when the fields and mountains are attired in red, white, and violet. Some call them lilies and others call them peaches while some do not discern their beauty, for the Building is a black spot in the crystal water or a fester in the eye. The Building was built by the British on a wide area overlooking all of the village fields and houses. It became their headquarters, and then Jordanians and Israelis followed them. The Israelis transformed it into a fearsome prison during the Intifada. Beauty was forgotten and the village's name became deeply related to that prison. It became associated with blood, fire, torture, and suppressed emotions. No sooner had the village's name been mentioned to a person from Al-Ein or another place than a shiver of fear swept through his limbs. He would say, as though you had awakened his unconsciousness, "Al-Ein...the Castle of Death!"

The Castle of Death or the Castle of the End, this had been before the Israelis evacuated it after signing an agreement with the National Authority, and before they set up their checkpoints one kilometer to the north of its main entrance. They took everything with them; they moved the detainees at night to other jails; they cut off all trees and barbed wires that used to surround it from all sides; even the cypress trees which the British planted were uprooted and carried away. To the villagers the headquarter building looked as nude as a ghost. Whether deliberately or not, the Israelis did not clean the tiles and walls of cells. A few hours after the Israelis' withdrawal from the headquarter building, men, women, and children from different parts of Palestine rushed to it. The young came with their memories of the torture cells on whose walls they wrote with their blood the sweetest words of love. The mother and the beloved has always been Pales-

tine, "Beloved Palestine...how can I enjoy sleep away from you?"

In all what we saw written on the walls, we only noticed one scribble where the name Palestine was not mentioned explicitly. Instead, such words appeared, "To Aisha who has been lost on the paths of exile...wait for me...I'm coming to you on a white horse." These words drew our attention more than others, for they seemed to have been written more than any other words. This is the military governor's office where Ismael killed Jacob twenty two years ago. And this is the large hall where intelligence and military officers interrogated Iman for marrying her 'dirty' Palestinian husband and was forced to adopt her religion again. This is the room where the military governor summoned him up to a tense meeting to receive Wadee'a's dead body.

We gathered in the open air to celebrate the Israelis' departure. With hearts filled with shattered happiness, we called each other to visit the Martyr's Cemetery. But, the next day, when we looked at the Building from a distance we felt something was missing from our life, something we could not express or identify. Suddenly, deep silence overwhelmed the place as though the crowd had been spellbound.

Two hundred years ago, one of Hajja Mahboub's grandfathers settled in this village, and nobody knew where he came from. The townspeople only remember that the man's name was Abu Dabour. No one could tell whether this was a real name or a nickname given to him at his former home. Mahboub said he lived near the Hebron Valley where the village raises its skirt to embrace the valley in the place called Al-Ghamari. This name was one of the man's nicknames, and the shrine was his abode and Abu Kharouba's shrine was his tomb. All the lands to the west and the south of the village were named after one of these two shrines. As years passed, the name Al-Ghamari became more famous than Hebron, and the valley from the shrine to Iraq Abraç was known as Wadi Al-Ghamari.

One day after the June War, the Israeli military governor sent for the Mayor of Al-Ein and the Mayor of Hebron. He literally said to them, "Let's implement the agreement between you and Abraham, our prophet." "Abraham is our prophet, and he is the one who called us Muslims. So you want to enforce a revoked agreement." The mayor of Hebron corrected the governor. "We have never seen or known this Abraham you're talking about. It is believed that a man by that name appeared in a misbegotten time of history and came to this land as a fugitive asking its people for a piece of land as large as a bull's skin to live on. The people gave him what he requested, for they thought such a piece would not take much of their land," the Mayor of Al-Ein remarked.

"Abraham is the father of all prophets, and he's inspired by God," the governor said in correct standard Arabic, showing an accurate knowledge of the geography of the place. He spread a map on the table and said, "When Abraham bought a piece as large as a bull's skin he was implementing an agreement. If you didn't understand that he meant 'a bull's skin cut into strips', it's your problem. Cut into strips in today's technological standards equals the area stretching from Iraq Arbaq to the south of Al-Ein to Kfar Asion to the north of Hebron; otherwise, why is the area called Mount Hebron? We'll implement the agreement step by step. We'll begin by rebuilding his city of Kiryat Arba'. Then, we'll restore the land to the west of Al-Ein where the shrine of Abu Kharouba lies. And if you have any thing to say about the agreement you have one month to appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court of Justice."

"Our problem with the military governor is indeed a serious one. Who brought this Abraham to our place. I wish he never came, nor did we ever meet him," the Mayor of Al-Ein Village Council said while leaving the governor's headquarters.

That was the story. The people protested and resisted the governor's decision. They attacked Jewish settlers with grenades, while

performing some religious rituals in the Mosque's Cave. Forty of them were killed and wounded, as official Israeli sources admitted. A young man from Ghaith family who was Waheed's friend in the tenth grade carried out the attack. No one ever believed that such a young man could do it. He was arrested and sentenced for life. From his jail, he continued sending letters to Waheed who did not dare to open them believing the Israeli intelligence would arrest everybody who had any relationship with the young man. A short time after this incident, a group of Fateh's fighters ambushed the Israeli military governor in front of the post office building. They missed the governor but killed three of his high-ranking officers. The townspeople marched in the streets of Al-Ein and headed for the confiscated lands involved in the governor's decision. They set up tents in the open air and swore to God they would not leave their land.

As expected, the Israeli reaction was quite harsh. Six young men from Hebron were led by some Israeli soldiers who mercilessly killed them in the grape fields. Despite the subsequent massacres and calamities that befell the city, that incident is still engraved in the people's minds as the most tragic one in the history of the city. For seven days, the young men's torn-off limbs remained hung on the branches of the grape trees while their families looked for them. The Israeli tanks roared through the city streets as if they were occupying it for the first time. At midnight, helicopters attacked the crowds in Al-Ein, throwing tear gas bombs at them and chasing them through mountains and valleys.

This is the story, and the history of the land is a story. The governor's decision seemed to be an act of destiny that had to be accepted. Abraham in whose niche we pray five times a day seemed to be the source of the curse. We started to doubt him and his prophet's sons and, like the Mayor of Al-Ein, we reiterated, "we wish we never heard or knew about him." In fact, we never did. We even became skeptical about our own religion and our entire existence. We believed no one could rescue us from our calamity except Abu



Kharouba, Hajja Mahbouba's grandfather. So we enlarged the shrine and lit it with candles. We burned incense on its threshold, and buried our dead people near it. We even implored God, praying, "For Abu Kharouba's sake, please hasten the day when the stone talks to a stone to tell us about the Jew hiding behind it calling for his killing." We sought Mahbouba's advice. She asked us to put three ostrich feathers of different colors in three places in the Holy Qur'an, one at the beginning, another in middle beside Surat\* Taha and the third at the end. She asked us to wait for a week, and if the feathers multiply, the Jews would depart in six days or six months or six years; otherwise, they would stay for quite a long time. The week elapsed and the feathers did not multiply. We went back to Mahbouba who asked each of us to plant an olive tree in front of his house and to take care of the tree until it became as big as the one in front of Abu Kharbou's shrine. Then, every house would become a shrine and the land would become paradise that the Israelis would not be able to confiscate. Pursing our lips, we left saying that the old lady was going insane.

And the Governor said, "Let there be Kiryat Arba." And there was Kiryat Arba' from which descended a bearded devil who, at the dawn of the Night of Power, killed Abu Qais with forty shots and killed thirty nine other worshippers who were praying in the Abraham Mosque. "Do you know, Abu Qais, that Abraham, whose niche you have been praying in for years, and whose prayer to Ismeal, 'God, keep this country safe', you have repeated while getting ready to walk between Al-Safa and Marwa\*, has plotted to kill you thousands of years ago. Or is it a matter of interpreting the tale? The logic of interpretation depends on the power of the interpreter... 'as big as the bull's skin cut into strips', the Israeli military governor emphasized. "We hold the power of narration and the power of interpretation and the power of implementation," the governor added. "We know you have the power, and you'll confiscate the land whether we like it or not. But we refuse to be witnesses to a false agreement, with which

Abraham had nothing to do," the two men simply protested.

And the Governor said, "Let there be Eretz Israel." And there was Eretz Israel settlement on Abu Ismael's land. They annexed to it all windflowers fields behind Abu Kharouba's shrine which they proclaimed a natural reserve. Abu Ismael stubbornly insisted to continue working on his confiscated land under the guidance of Jacob, a Jewish settler, who was later appointed the military commander of Al-Ein until a national day called 'the Land Day' entered the national Calendar. On that day, Ismael carried his gun and killed Jacob in the headquarters building. Sacrificing his life for his son, Abu Ismael, was arrested and tortured in order to reveal Ismael's hiding place, confessed that he killed Jacob. They tortured him to death. The settlement grew larger and larger and the fields were transformed into flower nurseries for export to Europe. How did you feel, Mahmoud Maw'id, when you cast a glance at the imprisoned flowers from behind a glass in the city of Paris? Did you try to hide the flowers' appeal in your heart? Your village is no longer a Palestinian one, for its flowers are no longer free!

Dear Al-Ein, I am sitting here in front of my mother's kinf with my pen and papers, delving deep in my innermost tunnels looking for the remains of a dream wrecked by the nightmares of darkness. The world around me moves to its destination while I am handcuffed with the constraints of memory, trying to find my way amidst the forest of my desires. Your memory is like a spider's web faint but murderous. Yet, I have sworn to reconstruct you in my memory. My memory is like my mother's kinf, no sooner does an idea strike my mind than it opens a stream of unorganized ideas, jumping, running, limping and colliding but without anyone replacing another. I fumble in my mother's kinf, in the reservoir of my illusions, desires, hallucinations and notepapers and the god of time slaps me on the face and I scream, "Oh, my mother's kinf, my lair, do you still have some bone remains? My dear village, you're a strange collection of bravery and despair, of innocence and cunning, of modesty and humiliation, of legitimate fear and injured dignity that is deeply-rooted in the heart of land."

He was brought handcuffed to the court in Jerusalem after being arrested while trying to set foot on his confiscated land. He was ordered to take an oath 'to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. "I do," he solemnly swore.

"What is your name?" the judge asked him through an interpreter while examining some information in a file in front of him.

"Waheed Msalem."

"Your ID number?"

"981910441."

"Place of birth?"

"Palestine."

"Give name of village, city or camp."

"Under the lotus tree."

"Give the exact place."

"I swore to tell the truth. This is the truth:

Waheed Msalem is my name.

The mentioned number is my affirmation.

Palestine is my dame,

Al-Ein is my habitation,

The lotus tree is my fame,

And heaven is my destination."

The interpreter laughed. He did not know how to translate it to the judge. The judge ordered that Waheed be untied and to proceed to the stand. The judge opened a map and gave the man a pen and asked him to draw a line round the land he claimed to be his. With wide-opened eyes, Waheed was unable to distinguish anything on the aerial map where names of places were written in Hebrew. He could not even recognize north from south on the map. Knowing that his reply would decide the destiny of the land, he said, "All of it," and he drew a line round the whole map as Abraham did in the bull's story.

"You have to be exact," the judge ordered.

"I know the exact boundaries of the land from the lotus tree which is not shown on the map," Waheed answered.

"Do you have documents to prove your ownership of the land," the judge asked.

"Yes, the lotus tree."

"It's not a document. That's not enough."

"Everything is not enough- the contract between my father and the bedouine."

"Not enough."

"The tax receipts during the Ottoman rule."

"Not enough."

"The tax receipts during the British mandate."

"Not enough."

"The receipts that show the ton of wheat my father used to offer to support the Palestinian struggle during the Government of com-

mon Palestine."

"Not enough."

"What proof does your court accept, your excellency?"

"The original title deed."

The judge set Waheed free and announced the court adjourned till another hearing after a month.

Waheed went home and asked his mother about the original title deed to prove ownership of the land. She told him it remained with the bedouine who sold the land to his father, and the bedouine died a long time ago and his heirs were scattered in different places after the war and nobody knew where they lived. He looked into a heap of papers which his mother kept in a wooden case hoping to find anything to support his claim in front of the judge. There, he found dirty yellow papers with dog-eared ends that tore as he tried to open them. He also found tax receipts that belonged to different governments in different languages, Turkish, English and Arabic. His heart beat fast when he saw a big hard paper thinking that it was the title deed. To his disappointment, it was his grandmother's, Mahboubba, marriage certificate. He read that Mahboubba's dowry was ten gold lires and a ton of wheat, which might even be more than the price his father paid to the bedouine for the piece of land. In fact, his grandmother was so beautiful that her beauty almost caused a civil war between the towns of Beit Jibreen and Al-Ein. Prince Abdulla personally mediated to solve the conflict after a young man had killed the chief Sheikh of Beit Jibreen who endeavored to kidnap Mahboubba to marry her by force. The Prince found the young man innocent on the grounds that he killed the Sheikh in defense of honor. He asked the townspeople of Beit Jibreen to bury their dead man and seek God's forgiveness for him. "An eye for an eye, and the instigator must bear the brunt," the Prince said.

Following his mother's advice, Waheed went to Amman to look for the title deed at the Land Department. Luckily, the head of the department was one of his old classmates. Asem Ma'moun was a handsome man whose

smile never left his lips. They were classmates in the tenth grade and Asem used to sit behind him, and he was the one who initiated the greeting to the Arabic teacher with "I love her and she loves me..." and then other students repeated after him. And despite their competition to win the hearts of school girls, their meeting was a happy occasion to revive old memories and erase the sorrow that was reflected in their grey sideburns.

Asem assured Waheed that his case was the main concern of the entire Jordanian government which was keen on restoring every inch of land from the Israeli occupation. But, there were no original papers in the department. All those papers were kept in the archives in Turkey. Asem offered to help Waheed to get there as soon as possible in order to obtain the original title deed.

Asem asked the director of the government's office to provide Waheed with a document stating his mission and an air ticket on the first flight to Turkey. The trip lasted for three days, and Waheed returned with the original title deed which was written in old Turkish (before Turkey adopted the European alphabet). The matter was so easily performed that he thought that Asem had arranged every thing ahead of time before his arrival in Istanbul.

Waheed waited for the second hearing with great joy.

"Here it is," Waheed waved the original title deed in front of the judge. Fixing his glasses while examining the papers, the judge said, "This is not enough."

"But this is the original copy you asked for, your excellency," Waheed replied.

"I need a validated copy from the original source in Arabic or Hebrew," the judge demanded.

The session was adjourned for another month.

He returned to Istanbul and brought three copies in Hebrew, Arabic and English. All copies were validated by the source as the judge ordered.

The judge could not hide his confusion when he saw the three copies, and he hastingly adjourned the session for three other months. During this time, Waheed would not be allowed to set his foot on his land in compliance with the confiscation decree. Muttering some words in Hebrew, the judge left the courtroom hurriedly.

Waheed asked an Arab who was waiting for another case if he understood what the judge had said. The man explained that the judge said if Waheed wins the case, the Arabs would come tomorrow and claim the court building itself.

Three months later, the third hearing was held. The courtroom was full of audience. Most of them were from Al-Ein. They came to support their fellow citizen. They patted his shoulder as a sign of encouragement. "You're, indeed, a great man. You went to Turkey twice and brought the original title deed they asked for. You must win the case; otherwise, there will be no justice in this world," some of them said to Waheed.

After a short summary of the case, the judge read out his verdict while the interpreter translated it into Arabic: "Ownership of the land, called Um Sidra, shall go to the Israeli authorities. The land shall be used as a natural reserve and be annexed to the natural reserve of the nearby settlement as of 'Eretz Israel'. However, in view of the papers presented, the plaintiff shall have the right to 1000 sq.m. around the lotus tree. The plaintiff shall have to make arrangements with the concerned Israeli military authorities to decide on a way to get to that particular piece of land." Issued in Jerusalem, 30/10/1991.

The courtroom was in uproar after the judge finished reading the verdict. "This is sheer injustice. Is this what you call democracy?" the audience protested. When their anger abated, Al-Ein townspeople came to console Waheed. They said ironically, "By the way, the judge's decision is not bad. You've got one meter for every thousand meters. Something is better than nothing. God is so gracious, the lotus tree grew in your land. Hajja Mahbouba was then right when she suggested that every one should plant an olive tree in front of his house. May God bless her soul. God knows whether they're going to allow you to reach the remaining patch of land!"

And here we are, sitting in the balcony before my mother's kinf. I stretch my arms to hold it to my chest, but I feel I am embracing a mountain of fog. Continue your tale, Shehrazad. Our night is still long and King Shehrazar has forgotten his dream on the road. Offer him your body, for nothing is more painful than when a loving woman offers her body, but, for no reason, she fails to express her inner feeling because she does not know where to find it. Go on with the story. The morning is still strutting, and neither the rooster's crow nor the Muathen's\* call for prayer will interrupt you. Please, Shurouq, stop nagging. I promised to buy you the flowers you want tomorrow to celebrate the beginning of your life. For now, just sit beside me and let me enjoy your company. Tell me the story of Saddam Hussein's rockets which you were telling to your playmates while climbing the roof to watch them fall toward the coast like meteoers.

"The Patriot asked Al-Hussein, "Where are you going, man? "

"To Tel Aviv."

"How about falling on the West Bank?"

"No, no, I can't. It's under curfew."

"Well, listen to this joke," Shurouq added. "The people of Jerusalem insisted on offering Al-Hussein a cup of coffee, but he said: 'I'm sorry I've been offered a Nescafe in Tel Aviv.'" "The best joke is about the Hebronian who went to the Civil Service Department seeking two masks for he was scared from the dual chemical rockets." "Still a better joke is about the Hebronian who painted his house sakani\* (grey) for Iraqis will not shell populated areas."

"Dad, this is rubbish, and I'm fed up. Saddam has disappointed us as he has disappointed himself. Dad, I love flowers and you want to make me forget my birthday. Do you remember the beautiful flowers we once saw in the shop window near Al-Manara Turning?"



"Yes."

"I want some."

Do you hear me Halima? I did not mean to offend your dreams or sorrows. God forbid! I believe you and I understand you. Had you told your dream to Hajja Mahbouba, she would have said, "Listen, Halima. We're all on the verge of an abyss and the whole universe is at stake." That is why I looked for Hajja Mahbouba in 'The Wasteland', and my students mocked me for they did not understand my point. Do you remember the blind prophet in 'The Wasteland'. He told the truth, but nobody believed him. Do you remember the red rock which is the only tree that has a shadow in the wasteland whose merciless sun burns the memory of the dead. That rock is the lotus tree under which Hajja Mahbouba died. We found her a day after her death. My mother knocked on her door to wake her up for the dawn prayer but she was not there. Then my mother knocked on the neighbors' doors, asking about her. Soon, the news spread and the whole village went looking for the woman. They looked for her between the two shrines, in the alleys, in the fields, between the houses, under the walls, but to no avail. 'She could have stumbled against something and could not go back home!' some of them joked. When we got tired, we gathered near Abu Kharouba's shrine and began calling her name aloud. Wade'a climbed up the shrine dome and looked. Suddenly, she shouted, "Mother, I see my grandma. She's sleeping under the lotus tree."

Mahbouba's death under the lotus tree remained a secret like the secret of death itself. Nobody knew why she had decided to go there or when or how she got there. Every thing implied that it was a normal death for which she had prepared herself as if she had an appointment with God. She took off her gown and put it under her head in the direction of Mecca near the tree trunk. The women wrapped her in a cloth-coffin which they made from their head covers and carried her body to her house. The men walked behind the women in that spontaneous procession. And thus, Hajja Mahbouba died!

"Wadee'a, o young devil. If you continue to live, you'll die miser-

ably," Mahbouba used to say when the girl filled her mouth with water and blew it at Mahbouba's pipe to put it off. "Amena, take this naughty kid away," Mahbouba yelled.

One night Wadee'a hid in Mahbouba's room and kept watching the old woman taking her dress off before going to bed. Then the little girl ran away through the window like a jinni, crying "mother, mother, I've seen something you've never seen like it. I've seen something like the kinf aperture."

"Shame on you, Wadee'a. Stop teasing your grandma," her mother reprimanded her.

Hajja Mahbouba died and Wadee'a was about to die with her. Bitterly sobbing, the girl firmly held the coffin while the men were trying to carry it to the grave. We forced her to let go and leave her grandmother to go to her 'hereafter' silently. We all wept with the girl. Trying to calm her down, we told her that the old lady left the rosary and the pipe for her to keep till she came back. To our great surprise, we found that Wadee'a kept the rosary and the pipe for twenty years after her grandmother's death. We found the things in Wadee'a's room three years after Wadee'a's murder in the cave. After my father's funeral, we all returned home. We intended to close the house and leave with our mother for good. But death recalls death, and its threads are like those of a spider, weak but murderous. We imagined Wadee'a, the child, holding tightly onto our mother's dress crying, "Don't leave me alone. Don't leave me alone." We were overtaken by sorrow as if we had just put her in her tomb near her grandmother.

"Who killed Wadee'a?" Waheed's question surprised his mother.

"Ask Majid."

"You always say the same thing. What's left of Majid to ask? The remains of his bones which I imagine whispering in your kinf, 'What a shame, you've left my mother die of leprosy and you refused to bury her for fear of infection'! And what's my guilt, Majid? I gave

you the leadership, thinking that you were fit for it, and I immortalized you in my trembling words."

The lecture on cultural studies bored him, so he picked up his books and sneaked out the back door and headed toward the cafeteria. It was lunchtime. The place was crowded, and the students were chatting aloud. Some were laughing indifferently, while others were engaged in heated political debates about the achievements of the revolution whose anniversary was approaching. The place was stuffy, and a revolutionary song that came from the tape recorder was louder than the noise in the hall:

O mother's eyes, shed condoling tears  
 O the affectionate sand of earth, embrace us  
 O the martyr's mother, send a trill cry of joy for us  
 We swear by the Palestinian land  
 Wazir Al-Fateh guides us  
 O men, we are patient warriors  
 Abu Ammar with his kufiya\* waves for us  
 You're the greatest hero  
 Your young fighters are Palestinians.

For half an hour, Majid waited in a long line to get his meal of rice and dry beans with tomato sauce. He joined Wadee'a and some colleagues around the table opposite the window. Gazing out the window, he began to eat. He noticed that it had been raining all morning as he took his place round the table. For a while, he kept watching the rain drops scatter on the window panes and slip softly down as if they were skin flakes peeled off by a sharp surgeon's scalpel.

"Don't forget, the day after tomorrow is the solidarity day with the people of Nablus. I've heard on the radio this morning that the occupation forces have decided to change the site of the settlement

'Aloun Moreh' as a result of our popular pressure," he informed his colleagues while chewing his food.

He had a burning desire to stay near the land, any land. During his study at Birzeit University, he never missed any opportunity to participate in solidarity days to support the people whose land was confiscated by the occupation forces.

"Is there enough room in your heart for our love?" Wadee'a, whom he came to know closely during his study, surprised him with the question in front of the other colleagues around the table. "What do you mean?" he inquired. "What do I mean to you?" she replied.

Majid was not ready for that type of personal question and he was embarrassed. He did not want anybody to know that he was in love with Wadee'a. He had convinced every body around him he had only one beloved, the revolution. Any other love was strictly forbidden.

"What's wrong with you? Have you gone mad?" Majid reprimanded her as he asked her to go out.

"What made you angry?" Wadee'a asked. "You've confessed your love to me, but I see no room for it in your heart; one solidarity day with Nablus, a day with Ramallah, a day with Hebron, a day with Salfet, and day with Jinin, day after day after day. Don't you have a day for our love? The land has been confiscated, it has been lost, so what can we do? It's not our mistake. Isn't our right to have a day when we can discuss life, society, people, the future?"

"You've injured my revolutionary pride by asking me in front of my colleagues. You could have waited for another time," he explained.

"I've waited enough and discovered that you don't care about our love. Tell me, what's wrong with my question? Let our classmates know, so I can go out with you and support you. Do you think it's only you who cares about the land?" she insisted.

"You seem to confuse things. Our love is different from the love of the land. Our love is a feeling that concerns the two of us, and it

should remain secret. It's exactly like the love of a married couple. Revealing love is a kind of weakness that is typical of women or unmanly men, and I don't want to look weak in front of my friends and in the Organization. Look Wadee'a, I love you, and my love to you is like that of the rain to the earth, that of a bird to its nest. So it has to be kept as a secret like the secret relation that is between the sky and the earth and the bird and the tree," he explained.

Wadee'a retreated to the hall and left him standing alone in the rain. Despite his strong objections, she and a number of her colleagues planned a separate trip to Nablus. Majid was not aware that the greenness of the land was like that of her love for him. It was haunting her imagination and watching her with the profound silence of fog, earth and stones. It makes her live the paradox of her love for Majid. But how far is this from Majid's understanding?"

Perhaps, this is part of men's nature. They want to have a monopoly over the revolution, the martyrdom, the leadership and the future. Or, perhaps Majid was living a romantic revolution that has already vanished. In the Organization, he was taught by heart:

"I'm the son of Fateh,  
I only cheer for it,  
And to its army,  
The maker of my revolution."

"O, Wadee'a, don't ever tell lies," Hajja Mahbouba always reprimanded her when the girl tricked her and tried to put out her pipe in which she burned incense.

"Dear grandma, it's the rain that has fallen from the ceiling," Wadee'a used to say.

"Always tell the truth whatever the consequences will be," the old woman urged her.

The night before the June War broke out, the Jordanian chief commander summoned her to the Building and told her, "Hajja Mahbouba.

We are at the advent of a historical victory. Tell Aviv is near at hand. According to the martial law, we have to raise the moral of the people for the grand victory. So Hajja, please invite the townswomen to the school playground and sing for the victory which will certainly come," the commander enthusiastically relayed his message. "Honest to God, sir, I knew nothing of what you've said. But I was coming to you before you sent for me to tell you that last night I saw you in my dream running away and twenty other men were following you," Mahbouba said.

The commander got furious, considering what she said as an insult to his military pride and a rumor no less dangerous than the psychological warfare waged by the enemy. He ordered that she go back and forth three times from Abu Kharouba shrine to his office while sending trilling cries of joy for the awaited victory. The old woman cried:

"Awiha\* Salim's hand  
 Awiha the father of pride  
 Awiha we buried it alone  
 Awiha nothing has grown."

"Stop that insane old woman," the officer ordered.

"Listen, sir, do you see that telephone post which Amran, the idiot, used to water hoping that it would bloom so he could offer Aisha, his sweetheart, some flowers? If that post blooms, you will achieve victory," Mahbouba bitterly remarked.

And Hajja Mahbouba died under the lotus tree leaving Wadee'a alone. The Israelis discovered her secret after the 1967 War. They came to her house in convoys of luxurious cars that bewildered the townspeople. In spite of her weak eyesight in her old age, she could see 'the hidden and the invisible'. She burned incense in her pipe and could count the days, the months or the years of the inquirer's life on her rosary. She could bring together divorced couples and separated lovers. By secret arts, female jinnis hurried to her service, and disappeared upon her demand, looking for the hidden amulet or the unearthed secret.

When Moshe Dayan visited the town after the war, he summoned her to a meeting. They met in the same place where she met the Jordanian officer a year before. The old woman asked the Israeli general to pay his debt for Salim's death, and she told him the story of her son's death when his soldiers exploded the police station, and how she miraculously escaped. She accompanied him to the cemetery where she buried Salim's hand. She told him she would never forgive nor forget and warned him against belittling her words. Then, Moshe Dayan replied that he liked Arabs because they reminded him of the simple Israelis and their spiritual life as described in the Torah. "The war would be the beginning of peace," the Israeli general added.

Standing on a hill in the mountains of Nablus, Wadee'a and some of her colleagues began to watch what was happening down in the valley. She went a few steps down the mountain and the rumbling of bulldozers grew louder. She went further down among the rocks and the olive trees, and a settler caught sight of her. He fired a few shots in the air to terrorize her. Thinking that someone was killed, the other students gathered as they heard the shots.

"Why have you come here?" Majid asked her angrily in front of her colleagues. He was about to swear. Wadee'a kept silent the rest of the day except on their way back home. She whispered to the fellow sitting next to her in the bus, "Even when a woman hates she loves. She may be insulted by her lover, but she continues to love him because she is afraid, and her fears keep her burning in anger defying the dagger of death."

It never occurred to Majid that Wadee'a would refuse him when he officially proposed to marry her. The whole town could not believe it, and they thought maybe she fell in love with another man or that education had spoiled her. Malicious rumors about her spread quickly throughout the town, and for some time her story with Majid was the main topic of people's gossip till the Intifada began.

Addressing some townswomen in the school yard, Wadee'a said, "Today, we're at a crossroad. This is a new phase that calls for a

courageous role for women. The country belongs to us all, and we're all obsessed by our love for land. Majid is a revolutionary but not a lover and between his revolution and love there is a huge gap of illusion, fear and justification that has to be pulled down. The Intifada seeks to bridge that gap."

How could Majid pull down that gap between love and revolution? After his graduation, he could not find a job in any national institution. His last attempt was with the Free Opinion newspaper. And although he was not qualified as a journalist, he felt he had other qualifications that enabled him to compete with others as an administrator or editor or news reporter in that newspaper. He was willing to accept any offer. He graduated from Birzeit University with a bachelor degree in sociology, and he was very competent in both Arabic and English. He also had extensive experience in national work, and more importantly, the newspaper was public property. It was financed by the Organization's office in Paris, which used complicated methods to circumvent the strict marshal laws of the Israeli occupation to secure the money for the perseverance of the Palestinians. If it was an issue that concerned the organization, who else had the right to find a job? And if it was an issue of qualifications, Sylvia, the editor in chief, had a bachelor degree in pharmacy! Some even claimed she had a forged certificate, for she never worked in that field of specialization. She could not discuss matters related to pharmacy. However, she was very fluent in French, and she fascinated men by her Parisian accent and beautiful eyes. She also knew the weaknesses of the men around her.

"The newspaper suffers from a money shortage. And since you're involved in the organization, let the organization find you a job, bye!" Sylvia said to Majid.

Sylvia and Majid never met again. She even forgot his name and her meeting with him. The news about the decision of the Israeli authorities to release the three bodies was reported by her newspaper with Majid's surname misspelled, Zayan instead of Rayan. In fact, the news item was first reported by the French News Agency.



"I began to look for work in Tel Aviv. For a whole week, I searched for work, asking Jewish people in workshops, restaurants and warehouses. Losing hope, I went back to Al-Ein. This continued for six consecutive days. On the seventh day, Mohammad Wahdan visited me and advised me to go to Al-Karmel marketplace in Tel Aviv. It was the first time I had ever heard of such a place. I knew from Mohammad that it was a famous vegetables market. By the way, I did not know the guy well, but I heard he had some good connections. He could go to the Military Governor's office any time without waiting in line like the others. I gave that information no heed since I badly needed to find any work to save some money to make a living after graduation. I thought of his visit that night as one paid by a fellow citizen who wanted to help while I was denied any by the national institutions of the organization." "Post your bachelor degree on the grocery stand in Al-Karmel marketplace," Mohammad told me sarcastically.

I went to the place and asked the people who owned vegetables stands about a job. They told me an Iraqi Jew at the other end of the market needed an Arab boy to take care of his business. I headed towards the person who offered me the job provided that he would try me for the first week. If I proved myself, he would offer me a permanent job. I had never dreamed of the weekly wage which was 350 sheikels. I decided to do my best not to please my boss but for my own benefit. "Majid, you're excellent," the man told me in an Iraqi Arabic dialect at the end of the first week.

I returned to Al-Ein on the first weekend. A high-ranking official from the organization was waiting for me in my house. 'Abu Ra'ed', the official introduced himself. He came to tell me that I was appointed in charge of the military wing, and that I had to coordinate with Wadee'a, who was appointed in charge of the women sector in the Youth Movement in the town. Abu Ra'ed said that my work in Tel Aviv was an invaluable opportunity to secure weapons for the organization from any source. I only had to be careful and keep things

concerning the organization top confidential. Wadee'a was asked to visit my mother at 10 p.m., when nobody could see her.

Wadee'a was surprised to see Abu Ra'ed, who explained the instructions of the leadership and the new assignments. He said our cell was directly linked with the Central Leadership and the Region Leadership had nothing to do with it. Wadee'a seemed worried and she was not at all happy with my work in the damned marketplace in Tel Aviv, as she described it. She wondered if working in Israel served or damaged our national purposes! How could we, who used to burn the vehicles that carried Arab workers to Israel and described them as traitors, maintain our national credibility? She reminded of what the townspeople said about that damned marketplace. It was a brothel and a 'drug' market. I told her that, for a whole week, I had not noticed anything of the sort. I asked her to find me an alternative work in the town. Then, I would never go to Tel Aviv. I reminded her that the Military Governor's office refused my application to work as a teacher, and that our national institutions in Jerusalem, which received financial support to sustain our struggle, had become shops for nationalism. "The newspaper suffers a financial shortage," Sylvia said to me when I asked her for a job at the Free Opinion newspaper.

Anyway, instructions from the leadership were unnegotiable. We could discuss, inquire and argue about any issue, except what Abu Ra'ed said, for he always said the right thing! We met every Friday night in Al-Manal Valley for military training. Despite my awareness of the great risk of my new mission, I was very happy with it, for it represented an honor to any faithful Palestinian youth who dreams of serving his cause. I thanked the leadership warmly for the great privilege they conferred upon me.

After Abu Ra'ed had left, I seized the opportunity to end the misunderstanding between Wadee'a and me. I apologized for everything that had happened, especially at the university and on the hill near Nablus. Only then did I realize how terribly I had hurt her feelings.

"Listen, darling, I could not say this in the official's presence. I accepted the insulting work in Tel Aviv for our sake. I need the money badly...I need an independent house...I want to marry you. Damn the money, but can we build our nest in the tree of life without it? My work in Tel Aviv enables me to kill two birds with one stone: to prepare for our marriage and to get weapons for the revolution," I explained.

"Money is not our problem," Wadee'a responded. "It's true we both belong to the same organization and we believe in the same goals, but day after day I have the feeling that we're two different persons. Majid, you're not honest with yourself. You're not brave in our love. You think manliness and revolution necessarily contradict the relation of man and woman, so you shy away from being kind to me in front of the members of the organization or other people, though everybody somehow knows about our love. Why didn't you apologize to me in front of Abu Ra'ed when he told you about the decision of the leadership? I have to think it over and I have to consult someone who cares about me. Of course, you felt ashamed of consulting a woman! Anyhow, I'm not happy with your work in Tel Aviv, and I'm not happy with Abu Ra'ed as a person. I have nothing against him except that he deals with people as though they were lifeless machines."

I asked her to give me another chance, and I promised to be the one she dreamed of.

"The organization and people are not easy with us," I said.

"I'll give you and give myself another chance," she responded with a smile.

I was happy to return to Tel Aviv the next morning. A job, a position in the organization and a beloved awaiting for me! When I arrived, my Jewish boss was getting some vegetables from the wholesaler.

"Come and get the goods," my boss called in a weary voice. He looked funny. His thick brown hair was uncombed, and his blue eyes were swollen.

"What's wrong with Mr. Benny today. He looks 'brown'," the whole-

saler commented in Hebrew. I learned a few Hebrew words, and even if I did not know any, the language was not a problem, for most customers and wholesalers knew Arabic.

"I have no idea," I replied.

"Can't you see? He's drunk. Everybody here knows and laughs at him. Just take care," the man explained.

It was true. I discovered that he usually went to a nearby restaurant to drink alcohol and smoke grass, and at the end of the day he came back and took a nap near the stand, leaning his head against the wall like a dead body. So from the first day of the second week I was the real boss. One day, two people came while Mr. Benny was falling asleep behind the stand with his big head dangling over his neck. I thought they were some customers until one of them kicked him in the belly with his foot. "Wake up," he ordered. The other one came near the stand and began to put the vegetables in sacks he brought with him. The two men then pulled Mr. Benny from his hair for about three meters. The sun was about to set, and I was preparing to close the stand. At the beginning I only watched and did not interfere, but later when they were about to leave I stood in their way. With all my force, I aimed a blow at the face of the man who kicked Mr. Benny and another at the face of the other man who stole the vegetables. Taken by surprise, the two men took to their heels, leaving their loot behind.

After the incident, Mr. Benny restored his dignity, and I became the champion of the marketplace. I found out that they all were cowards. Mr. Benny was the most cowardly. In fact, he was good for nothing. He sold himself to the devil for a drink or a gram of grass. While wondering about the historical paradox that made such cowardly people rule over my people, I took pity on Mr. Benny and I honestly took care of his business. I could have stolen all his money while, as usual, he was stoned, especially because he never checked the money after that incident. On one rare occasion when he was sober, he told me he liked me and all Arabs though he killed ten of them during the war. He also liked animals though he often went

hunting before starting his new business in the market. He did this when he was young. Now, the man was about fifty five years old, I reckon.

As days and weeks passed, I came to discover that it was really a damned marketplace, as Wadee'a described it. It was a jungle where the strong devoured the weak, and where one was either a fierce monster or a victim, so I decided to be the stronger. My goal was crystal-clear- to exploit their weakness, for I found out their Achilles heel. So I went to my town every weekend. There, I met Abu Ra'ed and we resumed the training program, and I told him about everything that had happened in the marketplace. He encouraged me and usually said we were getting closer to our goal. He meant getting weapons. To him anything would be worth the risk, a bullet, a pistol or a gun, just anything. He always reminded me that a successful revolution was one that could find a way to get weapons from its enemies. I kept this matter secret. I even did not tell Wadee'a about it. Every time she urged me to leave the damned marketplace, I told her that what she heard about it was only false rumors. In fact, I did not know the source of her information about the place, but I assumed it was mere gossip circulated by some townsmen who worked in the Israeli workplace.

Finally, the beginning was due. Everything has a beginning. No matter how well-prepared a person is, and no matter what expectations and conclusions he draws, the moment of the beginning has its apprehension and impact on the person's emotions and conscience. It is a moment when mental implications and the awe-stricken conscience mix, and the heart begins throbbing quickly and the body trembles, and when the past, the present and the future melt together. Then, you feel that the whole world around you stands on top of a needle. A beautiful girl with black long hair hanging down her almost naked breasts approached the pile of apples on the stand and began to check pretending to be a potential customer.

"Can you help me? I need some red apples," she requested in Hebrew. When I went near her, she came so close to me that I felt her nipples touching me.

She coquetly said, "I'm Windy."

"Five sheikels a kilo," I said. I had some doubt about her.

Guessing from my accent that I was not a Jew, she said in Arabic, "O, say you're an Arab. I'm an Arab too, and my Arabic name is Sylvia. What's your name?"

"Hamid," I replied.

"Where are you from, Hamid?" she asked.

"From a Palestinian town that you don't know," I answered. I intended to give her wrong information about me.

"Would you like to try it," she said with a wink and bending forward to expose more of her breasts.

"Five sheikels a kilo," I repeated.

"A couple of dollars a gram, you idiot. There's nothing like it in the whole market. Twenty five grams is only for fifty dollars. Let your boss try it and if he likes it sell it to him for a hundred dollars. Think it over, and I'll be back later. Don't worry about the police " she continued.

A couple of hours later, she came back, wearing a modest dress.

"When I knew you are an Arab, I've decided to wear modestly, for we, the Arabs, feel jealous about honor. I sell it but I'm not an addict. This is gold that makes you very rich quickly, and it makes Jews humiliate themselves like dogs. A deal? I'll leave you twenty five grams and I don't want the money now, " she said and dropped the drugs.

I felt the earth was shaking while hesitantly stretching my hand to pick up what Sylvia had dropped. Imagine, when you wake up at midnight and open your eyes to find yourself swimming in a deep dark well where you cannot recognize the time or the place! Loud, mysterious screams...Wadee'a is in front of me...she is behind me...she is a bird hovering above my head...no, no, no. 'I'll give you another chance, 'I remembered Wadee'a saying to me. But, dear Wadee'a, the goal is near at hand, and the hunter has prepared his

gun and he knows what he wants.

Days passed by. I became Sylvia's most important partner in trafficking hasheesh. I was a dealer but not an addict. Gradually, my awe-stricken conscience calmed down. I relished their humiliation and corruption, for their intelligence did the same to our youth. Let them sink in the dirt. May God destroy them. I wanted to add insult to injury. The customers soon discovered the high quality of our stuff, so they kissed my feet to get a gram of it. I sent them to Mr. Benny, pretending I had nothing to do with the matter. As the demand grew, the price increased. I paid fifty dollars for twenty five grams from Sylvia, and I sold it to Mr. Benny for one hundred and fifty dollars. He either sold it or consumed it himself.

Even when Sylvia and I had utmost confidence in each other, I was keen not to give anybody, including Sylvia, any true information about myself. She only knew me as Hamid, the Arab guy, who sold vegetables and fruits.

"Don't think I'm one of those happy girls. I'm an Arab, and we care very much about honor. But I can get you the prettiest girl in Tel Aviv to sleep with. She's worth a gram of grass," Sylvia offered. She seemed to know the underground world very well. I told her I was married, and that such a thing never tempted me. "I need something else," I said emphatically after a pause. "I need weapons, any kind of weapons, firearms, grenades, any firearms." Pointing to some Jewish addicts, she said, "It's really very simple. Do you see those who are prostrating round you like dogs? Everyone of them owns a weapon and he's willing to sell it for a gram of hash."

"The problem is not this." I said. "As an Arab from the West Bank, I'm afraid the police would discover me and it might become a security issue. I'll pay three thousand dollars for any weapon you can get and help to send it to any area in the West Bank provided that I know about the area in advance," I added.

She told me that a friend, a woman soldier, with whom she used to travel to Beit Eel where she worked, was ready to sell Shamir's head for twenty five grams of grass. She promised to talk to her friend and to tell me the next day.

No sooner had Sylvia left than someone called, "Majid, where have you been?" I turned toward the caller. It was Mohammad Wahdan. Greeting me, he said, "I see. Yesterday's beggars are today's businessmen. You go to the town and you never ask about me. So since I'm in Tell Aviv I've decided to drop by," he said. I welcomed him and offered him a cup of coffee from the nearby restaurant, and we had a conversation about work, our town and the people. Although I succeeded in pulling myself together and hid my surprise at his sudden visit, I felt worried all day. But I soon came back to my normal state again.

"Mohammad al-Wahdan cannot be an Israeli agent. It cannot be the case that everyone who gets a permit easily from the military governor is a spy. People have their own interests and everything needs a permit from the military governor. Even if the guy works for the Israeli enemy, he knows nothing about me. It is true he helped me get this work, but he's done the same to many others," I wondered. With such an avalanche of thoughts, I was trying to resist the state of anxiety caused by Mohammad's visit.

I did everything through close planning and coordination with Abu Ra'ed. I had a deal with Sylvia; accordingly, she took care of buying weapons from the Israeli woman soldier, and I paid her three thousand dollars, in addition to twenty five grams of grass for each piece. Every two or three months, the woman soldier carried the weapon in her car. Pulling over near Beit Ur village, she hid the weapon near the road and left. Abu Ra'ed and the other men completed the mission. The time difference between hiding the weapon and picking it up was pre-planned, so no one could have any doubts about the soldier. Sylvia was very punctual in her appointments and commitments, and I was honest in carrying out my role in the agreement. Only once did we have a small misunderstanding. Sylvia once asked me to give her nine thousand dollars to give to her friend. We had a dispute as to whether three grenades would be considered as one or three pieces!



I finally agreed to pay her the money because two thirds of it would go to the soldier. Then, everything took place as secretly and meticulously as planned. This way, I succeeded in smuggling five machineguns of the Israeli brand, 'uzi', into the West Bank, two muffler guns and the three grenades. I was about to continue doing this, but a big, sudden surprise made me rethink my security considerations. Consequently, I went quickly to the town to propose to Wadee'a officially, so all her doubts could come to an end.

I met Abu Ra'ed in Wadi Al-Manal as we did every week. Very exhausted, I went home. I was going to bed when I heard someone knock my door. Slowly I opened the door, and I found Wadee'a standing in front of me. She apologized for the inconvenience and gave me a photograph and left quickly. I could not recognize the people in the picture first. Turning the lights on, I could see my picture with Sylvia with her naked breasts and long black hair almost touching me.

I did not know what to do, whether to follow Wadee'a at that late hour or not! I wondered what to tell her. It was my picture and there was no way to deny it. Should I tell her everything about the occasion of the picture? But I did not tell her anything about the whole matter. How could I do so and she always warned me against working in that damned place? Even if she believed me, the question of who took the picture and how it found its way to her remained a riddle. I was worried all day, thinking of the best and easiest way to solve the problem with Wadee'a, to regain her confidence which was terribly shaken by that picture.

I thought it best not to meet Wadee'a immediately. Instead, I believed I would propose to her officially in order to prove to her that I was sincere in my feelings and to eliminate any doubt about my betraying her with that lady. I asked Abu Ra'ed and my parents to go to her house to seek her father's consent on our marriage. I told Waheed, her only brother, to stay home that day. Then, the mysterious problem of the picture would be slowly detected.

And the pitch darkness muttered round my ear, and suddenly a voice that I could recognize called my name. 'O, grandma, I miss you as people miss the moon on a dark night...as the thirsty earth misses rain after seven years of drought. My grandma, hold me to you, put me on your knees and by your black rosary teach me how to invoke the spirits of the dead, and to beat the doorsteps with my feet to drive the devils away from underneath. Teach me to travel between the shrine and the headquarter building to tell Majid and Abu Ra'ed what you told the officer the night before the war 'till Amran's post blooms'. Teach me how to hold Moshe Dayan's wrist and tell him 'the remains of my uncle's hand with its ring lie underneath this land'. You dared to say it to him and ask him to pay his debt back when the fully-equipped armies fled the battleground. They did not believe you, grandma. How could they believe a crazy woman! This was what the officer had said when you were trying to rescue him from his illusions. Don't worry grandma, I believe you, and your words have become proverbs reiterated by many other women who, like me, believe you. When men, they do not like, propose to women they do not like, women would say 'till Amran's post blooms'. And when a murderer or a collaborator seeks forgiveness or atonement, they say 'blood never becomes water'.

You were severely wronged, grandma. Even when they went to take revenge against your kidnappers they wronged you and forgot your humanity. I'm now following your steps. Do you remember when I held your dress and wept bitterly so you would take me with you? And to calm me down, you said to me, "Sit down, Wadee'a and listen to this story." "A girl as pretty as a nymph went with her father to Beit Jibreen. When the mayor saw her, he said the nymph would only suit him and asked his horsemen to bring her so he could marry her. Her father heard the rumor and asked his servant to

run with the nymph to Al-Ein where they could not get them. At the same time, her father ran away to Beit Natteef and found refuge in an old woman's house. The old lady was sieving crops near the wheat well. She wondered where to hide the man. Finally, she found that the well was the safest place. She hid the man there and covered the well opening with some blankets. When the horsemen discovered his hiding place, not one of them dared to go down the well, so they set fire to the woman's blankets and mattresses and threw them in the well. The nymph's father and the old woman's wheat were burned. The nymph and the servant wandered for two days in the mountains while the horsemen chased them. When they reached the outskirts of Al-Ein, they shouted at the townspeople, 'Your honor has been violated.' Consequently, all men in Al-Ein chased the mayor's horsemen till they reached Beit Jibreen. All the people in the town gathered. A dark young man decided to take revenge by cutting off the mayor's head. Carrying his gun, he ran to Beit Jibreen. He killed the mayor in an ambush. Then, a terrible fight broke out between the two towns, Al-Ein and Beit Jibreen."

It did not occur to me that you were narrating your own story. You were the nymph, grandma, and the father who sacrificed his life and was burned was your father, and the dark young man who killed the mayor was your husband. Your story roars through my memory while I weave my love story with Majid and wonder about the meaning of love's justice. The nymph, though the heroine of the story, played no role in determining her destiny neither in her kidnapping nor in her escape nor in marriage. She was merely the 'object' they fought for and took revenge for what it represented. She was the thing that was given to the dark young man as a reward. And thus, her problem was solved in her absence. They did not ask her about her sorrow for her father whose remains were left as ashes in the old woman's well. No one remembered to ask her, 'Were you scared when the wolves were chasing you in the mountains and valleys between Beit Jibreen and Al-Ein?' No one asked about her true feelings while waiting to be

captured by the kidnappers and being offered as lean flesh on the table of lust!

Grandma, Majid wants me as the dark young man wanted the nymph. Once he told me, 'Three things are against you in the revolutionary work. First, you're a woman; second, you're pretty; and third, I love you.' To this I replied, 'I understand the first, and I know the second, but why the third?' He said, 'I'm selfish in your love, and I'm jealous and ambitious. I told him that all these were positive attributes if there was a balance between them and the confidence one had in the person he loved. He remarked that it was not a matter of confidence, but rather burning jealousy when he saw other young men and women swarm round me and leave him, listening to me more than they did to him, and every time I attended a meeting a misunderstanding happened because of me. They always said, 'All that Wadee'a says is true.

"So you're jealous of me not about me."

"No, on the contrary. Those young men make advances to you because you're a pretty girl. Each one dreams of meeting you secretly at a dark corner or in a far away valley," Majid said.

"I no longer understand you. This is not how a revolutionary man thinks," I said.

Despite this, I was always trying to understand his special jealousy and his sensitivity and ambition that made him different from other members of the organization. I was always trying to understand the rigid instructions of Abu Ra'ed. I sought refuge with myself and used to say, 'No problem, people change'.

What would you say, grandma, if you attended that meeting with Abu Ra'ed instead of me? That meeting was the beginning of the end. Would you give Majid another chance as I did? Or, would you make up your mind and firmly say to him, 'You have to choose between me or working in that damned market?' Abu Ra'ed was leading you to hell. I wish I said it. But, grandma, what shall I do with

my heart. I love him and I had no choice but to give him another chance. And because that was the last chance that encouraged him to say, 'This is an opportunity to get the two extremes together: the revolution and Wadee'a- a position in the organization and a sweet-heart awaiting for me. I'm afraid, Majid, lest your heart should split into two halves and the equation gets lost. But why this insistence on having a two-half equation? It has only one part, and all its constituents must coincide so the equation coincides with it self. This is how you envision yourself. You put me in one scale and Abu Ra'ed and the revolution in another. Abu Ra'ed is no different from the Al-Ein townspeople. They accepted the prince's blessings and forgot the nymph's heart that was burning with her father's body in the old woman's well.

Majid, listen to me only once. This way leads to the middle of nowhere. It separates the two halves of the equation, which you are trying to hold together. You can't swim to the other end of the river without getting wet. You can't dive into the dirty river and remain pure. Think of the one who has led you to that path. Anyway, I'll give you another chance, so my conscience rests at ease and you don't say I stood in the way of your ambitions. It is also a chance for me to restore equilibrium between my mind and my heart.

Things went on as Majid and Abu Ra'ed wished. I didn't know anything until I found Majid's picture with that lady in the market. I hid the picture and didn't tell anybody about it. What bothered me was not the picture itself but how it reached my door. There must be someone who keeps watching. There must be someone who knows about the nature of our relation with the organization. It must be someone from outside the organization, someone who does not want to see a happy ending for our emotional relation.

Naturally, my doubts first focused on Mohammad Wahdan. He was the one who knew where Majid worked, and he used to come to our house to sit with my father who lost his eyesight after being

beaten bitterly by the Israelis for the unfounded suspicions that he had some weapons. Such were the doubts people had in their gatherings. Anyway, people either forgot such doubts, or they justified them by saying it was in the interest of the country to have a person like Mohammad Wahdan who helped them get permits from the military governor. No problem that he was on the village council, for the hand we cannot twist, we must kiss and ask God that it will break.

Abu Ra'ed gave me orders to fetch three bombs from Beit Uur. He described the place and the time where I had to watch the car whose driver would leave the bombs in a bag near the road. Abu Ra'ed said the organization had chosen me for the mission because only a woman could do the job safely. I thought the issue was no more than a test on the organization's part to examine my competence and courage. But I also thought it would be a good opportunity to solve Majid's riddle, for Abu Ra'ed said, 'her' and not 'his' driver! Although I did not have a clear idea about Majid's role in smuggling weapons, I suspected that he and Abu Ra'ed were the operation masterminds. This would be more dangerous to me and to the whole organization. Shall I reveal the secret of the picture to Abu Ra'ed though I don't like the man for his unjustified harshness and his belittling my role in the organization? What will he say when he sees it? An act of female jealousy? Or leave Majid alone?

I went to Ramallah and spent the night in my brother's (Waheed) house to ensure arriving at the place on time the next morning. I wore a Palestinian peasant woman dress so I would not attract any attention. I watched the place from a short distance. Suddenly, an Israeli car pulled over and a woman soldier came out of it. She carried a bag and went round her car as if checking the back tires. Then she drove her car away. I walked slowly towards the place where she stopped and I found a bag near the road. Making sure that there was no one around, I carried the bag and headed for the village in a natural man-

ner. I took the bus to Ramallah and from there I took a car to Al-Ein.

When I reached Al-Ein and felt safe, I was curious to know what was in the bag. There were three bombs, each was wrapped like an apple, and there were also three bars that looked like Snickers, the American chocolate bars. I carried one of them and it was very light. I did not open it, nor did I know what was in it. But I thought it could be the stuff Majid used to sell in the marketplace. I put every thing back in place, and I shut the bag. In the evening, I hid it in the cave west of Al-Ein. I was determined not to give it to Abu Ra'ed, who came the same night. He asked about 'one, two, three' (a code people of the organization used). I jokingly answered 'six, one and two equals three, and three plus three equals six'. Abu Ra'ed cunningly said, 'It must be a successful operation then. Who said women are good for nothing?!

"It was a very easy job. If weapon smuggling is always like this I'm ready to specialize in it. Nobody searched me at the checkpoint."

"Only a woman can do this job safely, but don't forget you have been lucky this time. Where's the bag."

"Safe and sound."

"So give it to me."

"It is in a safe place."

"The organization's orders stipulate that you give it to me right now."

"You said the operation can be best handled by a woman, and I add only a woman can end it."

"Are you kidding?"

"Not at all."

"So give me the bag right now."

"I won't give it to you before I'm clear about the matter with Majid."

"What matter? Who is in charge, Majid or I?"

"It's something between me and Majid."

"You're violating orders. This is my responsibility."

"I said I'll not give it to you now."

"I'll try you and dismiss you from the Organization."

"Sentence me to death if you like, but I won't give it to you now."



Abu Ra'ed left the place angrily, and I was scared to death lest he would plan for my assassination that night, so I dared not sleep in my room for a whole week after that encounter.

Majid returned at the weekend. I decided to tell him about the picture, so I went to his house late at night after he had finished his organizational work with Abu Ra'ed. I gave him the picture as soon as he opened the door and I told him we would talk later.

I expected him to stay awake that night after receiving the picture and that he would follow me quickly to discuss the matter with me. But he returned to his work in Tel Aviv as if nothing had happened. I was extremely surprised when, the next weekend, he sent 'jaaha'\* to my father. He asked Waheed to be in our house when the men arrived. "Is it possible that such a very important matter is not worth a few minutes from Majid to discuss it with me?" I pondered. It was not the sentimental aspect that worried me. Majid was faithful to me; otherwise, he would have already married another girl. He had a clean record in the town. He was even the ideal young man in his behavior and devotion to the organization. To him, Abu Ra'ed's word was the most important. This however could be his problem. But, where was my place in the equation which he was trying his best to hold from both ends? Abu Ra'ed was the head of the elite group as if even our marriage was decided by his order! I asked Waheed to tell the men that the time was not ripe for discussing the engagement issue and that it should be left to chance.

As you advised grandma, I always say what I believe to be right. I could have forgiven Majid if he had discussed the matter with me because I had a great love for him in my heart. I waited hoping that Majid would get the message to put off the engagement. Days and weeks slipped by. During that time, Majid came to the town every weekend and went back to Tel Aviv without discussing the matter with me. Then he asked Waheed to convince me to accept his pro-



posal. My answer always was, 'the time was not ripe'.

Out of the blue, tensions escalated between the townspeople and the Israeli authorities. Three young men from the organization closed the main road to Bir Sheba at the first bend in the Hebron Valley. They stopped the first Israeli car that collided against the post. They killed the driver, a woman soldier, took her weapons and escaped toward the town center. The whole town was put under strict curfew, and it was besieged by Israeli soldiers for a month during which the occupation forces practiced a ruthless revenge. "That was an example of the Palestinian terrorism which caused the death of an innocent woman in cold blood!" the Israeli military authorities claimed.

Majid did not come to the town during the long siege, and we did not get along together after that event. Only a week later, an Israeli driver ran into an Arab car in Gaza and killed all its passengers. Tension overwhelmed the town once again after confrontations between schoolboys who were protesting against the car accident and the Israeli forces. Emotions in the entire occupied territories were building up and were about to explode. Majid came to the town in the middle of the week. Abu Ra'ed called for an emergency meeting at Majid's house. "We're beginning a new and dangerous stage of resistance. We have to cooperate and adhere to the leadership's instructions quite meticulously," he said. During the meeting, he insisted on my giving him the bag, and warned that not doing so would be a dangerous security violation of the instructions of the military wing of the organization, which could not be forgiven for any reason.

I promised to hand the bag over after clarifying something. Majid replied that according to the revolutionary work all issues had to be clarified in public.

"You were chosen to carry out a military mission, as Abu Ra'ed ordered," Majid said.

"It's my right as a member of the organization to inquire and clarify

things. I know and abide by the basics of the revolutionary work, but..." I responded. At that point, I felt my voice was imprisoned in my chest and I could do nothing but leave the meeting.

I expected Majid to run after me and inquire about what worried me or apologize or explain his stance concerning the bag or just say something. Exactly the opposite happened. Majid got involved in the Intifada which became everything to him. His name was at the top of the Israeli wanted list. So he was offered protection by all Al-Ein townspeople who willingly carried out his orders. And I continued waiting for his answer while all conditions seemed to have plotted against my hopes.

Here I am grandma. I am participating in the Intifada like a butterfly drawn around the light that it adores but will burn it. Do you know what worries me when I recall the story of my uncle's (Salim) martyrdom? You buried his hand with the wedding ring. His fiancée withered as did his hand under the earth, and she promised not to marry for fear of people's gossip. How could she betray her fiancée and wear another ring while his was still on his finger in his grave!

I often thought to dig out my uncle's ring and give it to his fiancée to set her free. She might enjoy freedom at the age of sixty!

Tell me grandma, am I wrong? This is a country where 'God' has died. This is a life wherein death has become the only real 'God'...

Call me Mohammad or Sheikh Mohammad, call me the disabled, the good-for-nothing or the prisoner. Call me the lion of Al-Ein. Give me any name or title you like. Names have become void of meanings, and titles have lost their color. No...no...listen, do not go away...I have remembered, call me 'Imran the idiot'. I wonder how this name has sparkled in my memory while I am tied to a wheelchair this morning and pushed by the nurse to find me a place under the sun in front of Abu Rayya Rehabilitation Center. As death reminds of death, similar disasters invoke each other. History repeats itself. Today is similar to yesterday. My history, gentlemen, is Imran's history. My day is my yesterday, and my yesterday has drowned in a sewer and perished exactly as has Imran. The only difference is that Imran dug the sewer with his own hands in order to earn a shilling to save for Aisha's dowry.

The only wage he accepted was a shilling, no more no less even if he worked for an hour or for thirty days and whether the work was hard or easy. He did not accept change, only one piece. When he got the shilling he turned it on both sides and said, "Your marriage is near at hand, Imran." And because the town people at Al-Ein discovered his skill in building stone fences round their houses and digging sewage holes in their yards, one had to wait his turn sometimes for a month or two or probably for a year. (He refused to dig a grave for all the shillings in town). When he finished his work, he used to dust off his clothes, carry his axe on one shoulder and his pick on the other and walk in the street that divided the town into two halves singing to Aisha:

O, you who combed her hair with a serpent tooth  
I will get you even if you are high in the sky.

His Aisha was any girl who was of the marriage age. Many girls

were promised to him by their fathers. But Imran continued to sing for his Aisha.

"Why does Aisha want to marry you, for your money or beauty or for your nice smell?" people used to say mockingly.

"Do you know what I have?" he would reply.

"Come on Imran, every thing is clear. You were born in shit, you grew up in shit, and you will die in shit. You could have nothing but shit. Aisha wants flowers and golden shillings and a man who can lift the quilt with his penis," people would say.

"I have a jar filled with shillings, and I have a dick which, when I wake up, raises the quilt like a tent. But tell me where can I get the flowers?" Imran would innocently wonder.

"Water the telephone post every morning and evening till it blooms. Then you can get the flowers you need to present to Aisha," they mockingly advised him.

The people's advice did not fall on deaf ears. Imran dug a hole round a telephone post opposite the Building. He watered the post in the morning and in the evening. Whenever he did that he looked up to the top of the post, and sang, "I'll get you, no matter how high in the sky you are." He kept the ritual of watering the post till the June War when the people of the town hid in caves and valleys but no one knew where Imran had gone. When the town was captured by the Israelis on the sixth day of the war, people went back home. Some of them fled to Jordan, many were killed while trying to cross the Jordan River. Through loudspeakers, the military forces warned that all weapons had to be turned in before 6 p.m.; otherwise, severe punishment would befall whoever had one. Next morning, the town was under curfew and a home-to-home search for weapons began. That was the first time in my life I heard of something called 'curfew'.

The occupation forces searched every spot in the village, between supporting beams, in stone fences, gardens, solos, cupboards and even sewers which they ordered to be emptied if they had a slight doubt they con-

tained something suspicious. It was noon when some Israeli soldiers jumped over a beam in the mayor's garden and began searching for weapons using metal detectors. Before they entered the house to resume their search, they had ordered the mayor to lift the lid of the sewer. The sun rays went vertically into the pit. Without any machine, people could clearly see the body of a person with his head downward and underneath it there was a big jar like those people used for storage of oils. More Israelis forces were summoned to the place and with the help of a tanker the pit was drained. Then the body was pulled out of it and dragged for about twenty meters. Then the jar was pulled out after making sure it contained nothing dangerous. The soldiers ordered the mayor to clean the jar which they carried with them and went on searching the neighboring house.

It was not difficult for the mayor to identify the dead body. Who in the whole town did not know Imran? The mayor was greatly perplexed. It was a real disaster. How could he carry the corpse, wash it and bury it? How did Imran fall in the pit in his yard? Did Imran do it deliberately? But the poor guy did not know what suicide meant. He must have been so afraid of the war that he thought the mayor's pit was a safe refuge! Anyway, his death was not a big enough deal to raise questions about its causes.

The mayor followed the soldiers, begging them to allow him to break the curfew in order to seek help from the Hebron municipality to get rid of the disaster. When the fire brigade arrived from Hebron, the officials washed the body that rested on the ground. Quickly, they dug a hole and with their feet they pushed Imran's body into it. They felt it was dishonorable to lift the body with their hands!

The townspeople still mockingly narrate your story, Imran. They still make fun of your history. Yet, you have entered their cultural dictionary without intending so. If one of them is late in paying back a debt, they say, "What's the matter with you? Are you waiting till Imran's post blooms?" And if one gets angry at another, he says, "May you face Imran's fate!" And if a girl gets beyond the age of marriage, other people say, "Let her

wait for Imran." And they say to a corrupt person or group, "They took the jar and threw the body afar?"

I am now sitting in front of the Abu Rayya Center, and I imagine you standing in front of me. Nothing but my tongue moves. Those who took your jar and threw you on the road were the ones who shot me. When they surprised me, I tried to jump over the stone fence that you might have built and they fired twelve shots at my back. The shots hit my backbone, my kidney, my ureter, my spleen, my belly and my bottom. They left nothing in my body capable of movement except my tongue which hardly utters a word. Even when it does, the words sound weary and stagger, making them difficult to understand, for my neck is supported and my head is tied to the back of the chair. I still feel their heavy weight when they stepped on my back with their heavy boots. Before I lost consciousness, I had heard them say, "We've orders to finish him up. Leave him for a while, and we'll kill him after the interrogation." I woke up in Tel Hashomair Hospital.

Today, Mohammad Wahdan visited me after the nurse had left me to help another patient. He trod on my foot and said, "The winner is he who laughs last." "You have the right to say so, Mohammad," I said. He spat in my face and left. His saliva ran down my face to my chin, and it was absorbed by my neck cover. Of course, Mohammad Wahdan had the right to do what he liked, for the organization leadership did not let me kill him. They said, "Give him another chance. He may repent." At first, Majid interrogated him, and he was forgiven after repenting in the mosque. But, investigations showed he never severed ties with the Israeli intelligence. A wireless telephone, a camera and a pistol were found with him when he was brought to interrogation. It was also found that he was commissioned by the Israeli intelligence to recruit women agents. Majid ordered him imprisoned for three days. What caused that light sentence? I didn't know. Later, Majid accepted his repentance so that he might become a good citizen just as the leadership instructed.

After Majid's martyrdom, the Israeli forces discovered the military sites of the organization in Wadi Al-Manal. They chased us in the mountains and valleys. Our military activity was about to come to an end after Majid's death and the loss of our military positions. I was ordered by the organization to take charge of the position. Despite the harsh measures of curfew and pursuit, we used to sneak into the town at night. We tried to raise the people's spirits and encourage them to continue the struggle. We also kept watching some suspects who collaborated with the Israeli intelligence. I asked the men to keep an eye on Mohammad Wahdan in particular because I was sure that the tiger never changes its skin. The men told me that Mohammad resumed his connections with the Israeli intelligence as he was one of the group of private forces, called 'musta'ribeen' (Israeli soldiers like Arabs) which entered the town two days ago. Our men kidnapped Mohammad from among the group and brought him to me outside of town. Knowing the news of the kidnapping, the Israeli forces were furious and imposed a stricter curfew on the town. They looked for him everywhere in town and the outskirts of town. They considered his kidnap a terrorist action which signaled a resumption of our military activity. After this event, the townspeople bestowed on me the title "The Lion of Al-Ein."

After being beaten severely, Mohammad confessed that he had never severed ties with the Israeli Intelligence. Once again the organization orders prevented us from killing him. We were allowed only to beat him or just to break his arm or leg so he would become an example for others. Then, he was given a second chance to repent and become a good citizen. It was Abu Ra'ed who gave the orders. I had full confidence in Abu Ra'ed and there was no other way but to carry out his orders. I set Mohammad free not out of pity but out of rage at the leadership which had the hope that Imran's post may bloom! Anyway, Mohammad's kidnapping was a psychological and security burden to us. I once thought of killing him in a way that would not let either the leadership or the Israelis know who did it.

But I was satisfied with giving orders to burn his house and expel him from the town.

Since the beginning of the Intifada, I had the feeling that Mohammad Wahdan was a dangerous person and if he was not killed he would destroy the organization. The problem of the organization was that there was no clear policy as to dealing with such people. In their social relations, the townspeople did not distinguish between a traitor and another person, either. So, despite his bad reputation and the proofs against him, Mohammad continued to be well treated by them. They exchanged visits with him and offered him coffee. They never disclosed his reality. What bewildered me even more was why Majid forgave him the first time despite his confessions and the evidence against him, which was enough to sentence him to death. At that time, the organization allowed killing agents. Was it Majid's own decision? Or, did Abu Ra'ed play a role in that issue? Actually, I was detained at Al-Naqab prison so I had no clear idea about what was going on during that period. But I was sure Majid had plenty of powers that enabled him do what he liked. But why didn't he resume the investigation in Wadee'a's death, though he had some evidence of Mohammad's role in it? Mohammad confessed that he forged an order by Abu Ra'ed asking Wadee'a to go to Tel Aviv to wait for a man who knew the password. He put the letter underneath her door. Wadee'a went there and she was surprised that the man was an Israeli called Yusi. She tried to run away, but Yusi pulled her toward him, trying to kiss her. She did manage to free herself from his grip, but Mohammad took a picture while hiding in one of the corners. That was the method the Israeli intelligence used to entice Arab girls. Afterwards, Majid decided to kidnap Yusi. He did it and the story beat all previous stories.

And thus, Mohammad Wahdan was saved to take revenge against me, to spit in my face, exactly between my eyes. I could not clean the remains of his spit. It seems that we all have conspired to let Mohammad Wahdan inherit the sacrifices of the Intifada. Abu Ra'ed,



Majid, Abu Qais, Hadi, Wade'a, the townspeople and myself are all collaborators in this conspiracy. Whether intentionally or not, we all contributed to digging the hole wherein we all fell, and Mohammad won the jar. Majid and Abu Ra'ed did it out of selfishness and their monopoly on decision-making, and Abu Qais did it out of old age and his abundant humanity. We left him in the town, for he became sick after Majid's death. I feel that when he went to the Ibrahimi Mosque that night, he was looking for an honorable death to conclude his long respectable history of struggle. But Wade'a's problem was in her meekness. She was so reticent that she used to suppress her agony when she should have screamed out loud. She hated Abu Ra'ed, for she believed he ruined her relationship with Majid. However, she continued to abide by his orders.

But as for Hadi, he lived in another world through which he was trying to win the jar and throw the corpse away. To him, people were no more than steps on which he could climb. The first step was the organization and the Palestine Liberation Office which were supported by a national basis and provided him with financial aid. The story of his marriage to Arnuna was the second step. He dramatized the story of his marriage as the story of love and reconciliation in time of war and deprivation. He won the sympathy of the Israeli left and foreign media. With the help of those Israelis, he established 'the Bridge Office'. Then came Sylvia and the Free Opinion newspaper. He debased himself to get a position in the newspaper. He also caused his sister much harm by pushing her to marry Irsan, Sylvia's brother. She died on her wedding night out of anguish. All that was done in the name of reconciliation between nations and religions, and Hadi is still climbing the ladder!

Could you believe, Imran, that Hadi has not visited me yet? I have been crippled for three years, but he has never asked about me! Do you believe that Sylvia's newspaper has not written a word about my problem though people in the West Bank and Gaza know about it? I am Ismael's brother, who was the first one to fire at the Israelis and swore to liberate all Palestine inch by inch. I'm the brother of Ismael who was in

charge of the Palestine Liberation Office. He supplied Hadi with support and money in the name of the Intifada. So, Hadi knows me well. He knows my parents and my sister and the history of my family. It is me, Imran, who spent most of his life in the enemy's prisons or has been chased through valleys and mountains. I am all this, and I am nothing at the same time. The price of my struggle was blood and sweat. I collected it shilling by shilling, but all the shillings seem to have fallen in the sewage pit where you fell, Imran! They usurped my history and left me in Abu Raya's Rehabilitation Center. They left me, dusting death away. My Aisha is like yours, Imran. She never waited for you. She was a lie that either you or they made up, but you believed it because it nurtured a hope in you, this illusion made you water the post of your despair so it would bloom one day and you could offer your Aisha some flowers!

On the day I was shot, the young people in the town prepared for a public meeting to make a political statement, for after losing our positions in Wadi Al-Manal, we lost the infrastructure to publish leaflets and announcements. Delivering the announcement in public was the only way to provide people with news. We used to do this despite the great risk it involved. This time, we carried out a meticulous search to ensure maximum security. I carried the statement in one hand and a gun in the other. But, no sooner had we begun the meeting than a woman shouted 'run away, run away.' I did not take the warning seriously, for it happened many times before and often turned out to be a false one. But this time it was like the story of 'the shepherd and the wolf.' A group of seven 'musta'ribeen' made their way through the crowd and confronted me with their guns. I became sure my death was imminent. There was no hope of escaping. The wall was behind me and they were right in front of me. But, I would not surrender, I would not die and let them take my gun, for the gun was more important than my life in this situation. Quickly, I turned my back and tried to climb the wall. I threw the gun to a child who was behind the wall. I shouted at him to run away with it. At that moment, the Israeli soldiers peppered my back with bullets.

The Israeli Intelligence interrogated me in Tel Hashomir Hospital. But I refused to answer any of the questions, pretending I was unconscious. I could hear the Israeli officer say, 'We should not do him the favor of killing him. Just move him to Al-Maqasid Hospital.' A group of Israeli Intelligence followed me there. Their questions focused on two main issues: kidnapping Mohammad Wahdan and Wadee'a's death in the cave. They wanted to know how I dared to kidnap Mohammad Wahdan and who helped me in that operation. They also wanted to know how Wadee'a was killed with a bomb usually used by the Israeli army. I gave no answers at all. In fact, I did not know the type of bomb Wadee'a had when she was killed.

Meanwhile I was seriously infected by a germ only contagious to patients with similar injuries. Doctors prevented people from visiting me. For a month, only my mother and Waheed visited me after arguing with the doctors. In fact, I did not want anybody, especially my mother to see me in that condition. My mother and Waheed entered the room while I was tied to the bed. When her eyes caught mine, she knew that I would never be the same again. Greatly shocked, she fell to the floor and fainted. The nurses rushed and took her to the emergency room. Waheed leaned his head against the bed and burst into tears. I said to him, "It is I who should weep, not you. This is our inevitable destiny that we have to face. Go and take care of my mother. No one but you can do that. Calm her down. Tell her that whoever wants Palestine to be his 'Aisha' has to pay with his blood and life as her dowry. When I carried my gun for 'Aisha', I did not envisage martyrdom to be the trophy. "

Al-Maqasid Hospital could not help me any more. So, I was sent to Abu Rayya Center. Most of the disabled in the center were wounded during the Intifada. They were children, young and old men and women, each with a story similar to mine. They spend their time in wheelchairs or on their beds which were given as a donation by a European country! Out of their immense despair, they usually spend their time throwing ashtrays, coffee cups or plates at each other. Sud-

denly, they begin singing around a tennis table which they use as a drum. They usually repeat the same song:

O, mother's eyes, come and condole us  
 O, the earth of the land, give us a kind hug  
 O, mother of the martyr, give us a cry of joy  
 We swear by the land of Palestine  
 Wazir Al-Fateh was treacherously murdered in Tunisia  
 O, young men, go and take revenge for his blood  
 Abu Jihad, the other leaders and the olive tree  
 The children of Palestine are the real heroes.

I used to hear this song once or even twice a day. But I did not participate in the singing, for I pitied those who still repeating it. I now feel that the song is out of context, the context of the home country and history. And I can imagine the distance between the abyss of despair and the top of hope. One of the fatal mistakes in our revolutionary culture which the Organization tried to inculcate is our unlimited ability to transform things through our boundless imagination into symbols; we neglected the signified and worshipped the signifiers. So the leadership's orders, though illogical, were as sacred as the Holy Quran. Did our leaders believe when they prevented us from killing Mohammad Wahdan that we ran social centers for rehabilitating agents? I hold the leadership accountable for such orders. I am quite sure that Mohammad Wahdan who spat in my face was the one who led the 'musta'ribeen' group into our town during that meeting. They came just to kill me, for they did nothing but shoot me in the back. They did not arrest anybody from the town, nor did they even try to get the gun that I threw behind the wall! I was their sole target.

Do you believe, Imran, that not one of the leadership has come to visit me? Nor have those who often cheered, 'Lion of Al-Ein' when they saw me, visited me! My mother pays me a visit once a month, for she cannot afford the hardships of the trip from Al-Ein to Ramallah through the Valley of Hell. Waheed visits me once a week. He is a

very kind man. I wish he was not mixed up with Hadi. I wonder what kind of relationship they have. Waheed always criticizes him, yet they are always together! Once, Waheed received me for a week in his house after I had been infected for the second time. In fact, the center's director demanded that I be isolated from the other patients.

Waheed and I sat in the balcony of his house. His daughter, who insisted on knowing why I could not leave my wheelchair, was there. While I told Shurouq my story, Waheed asked permission to take some notes.

I told Waheed that my story is no different from that of Imran the idiot. It is useless. He promised to keep the notes in the kinf that was in front of us. "The kinf is an honest store for my memories. It has never failed me. Many a time, the Israeli searched the place for forbidden things or wanted people without paying any attention to it. I keep my personal things in it, things that people usually overlook, things like the remains of wheat ears that survive after the harvest season. Some ears are picked by birds, others are picked by ants which store them for the winter season; still others remain inside the earth to revive the cycle of life in the next season. Your story, Mohammad, is the wheat ears ignored by the birds and left behind the ants," Waheed commented.

This is how I feel when I remember the child who picked up my gun. He knew who to give it to. Sometimes, I wish I could restore my health just to settle my debts with Mohammad Wahdan and with some of the organization leaders, especially those who gave him the chance to spare his life. I also wish to explode myself in front of the building Hadi is constructing. I beg you to keep away from Hadi because his world will inevitably lead to the abyss.

How can I be separated from Hadi? You have just said it- he follows me like my shadow. Many people think we are brothers. People usually seek my help when they want to get something from influential powers. "Ask your brother to help us get an import- export license or a license to establish a cement or alcohol factory from the Israeli authorities; ask him to get our son a visa to the USA in order to join a university," they begged. "He is not my brother, but I'm sure he will help you if he can," I always reply. My wife is the one who blames me most for it, or as she puts it, the hypocrisy and self-contradiction in my relation with Hadi. "On every political or national occasion, you criticize Hadi bitterly and in public, but at the end of the day you call him or he calls you to have coffee and smoke 'nargila'\* together," she reprimands.

In fact, despite knowing my public attitude toward him, Hadi has never let me down. I call him in the morning, in the evening or even at night, and he is always ready to receive me. I go to his house or he comes to mine or we meet at a restaurant. When he goes abroad, as he often does, he always tells me and when he comes back, he brings me a present, a shirt, a pantaloon, a jacket, or a tie. He tells me he does not like to buy presents for anybody except me, despite being overwhelmingly busy in conferences and meetings in Europe and other countries. I have no difficulty in buying your presents because we are of the same size. So when he buys me a present, he feels he does so for himself.

This is right. Although he is older than me, we share the same build and height. We also share the color of hair and skin. The only noticeable difference between us is that I use eye glasses but he does not, so I look older than him. And although I do not like to post pictures of politicians or artists on the walls of my room, I do not know why I posted the picture of Hadi and his wife Arnuna above

my desk. It was the same picture he kept in his office. At the bottom of the picture he wrote 'a courageous step forward'. My wife and my daughter do not like the picture. I wonder about the secret of their hatred. They always urge me to sever my relationship with Hadi. I also feel embarrassed when they show discomfort at his visit. Once, Shuroq frankly told him that she did not like him because he exploited me. To show her disturbance, she sneaked into my office and dropped Hadi's picture off the wall. She pretended to have done so unintentionally, but her smile did not show she was sorry. I collected the pieces of glass and dumped them into the trash basket and kept the picture itself in my closet.

Hadi always encouraged me to work with him. "Your idealism will ruin you or burn your mind, and you will end up in the madhouse in Bethlehem. People clap only for those who climb up the ladder, hoping to catch their tails so they could move a step forward. Some of them hold tightly with their claws, others fall down again. They eat what others plant. When they have the guts to plant, they choose the wrong harvest time. Then, they claim they planted but others reaped their crop. I know what people say about me. But, like bats, they all appear at night licking my tail as spoiled cats do. They invite me to their houses, "just a cup of coffee Mr. Hadi. You are the master and we are your obedient slaves." So what principles are you talking about, Waheed? This has been our problem from the beginning. Some people feed on hens, and others get entangled in the fence! Do you know who killed your sister, Wadee'a? Sorry, I have to say our sister. She was entangled in the fence exactly like Majid, Sheikh Mohammad and Abu Qais. Abu Ra'ed was the one who ate the hens! She discovered the secret of Abu Ra'ed's fortune, so he plotted against her and killed her. He thought the truth would die with her. Majid got cowardly and ended the investigation because he was scared of being exposed or killed by Abu Ra'ed. Believe me this is what happened. The Israeli intelligence had no hand or interest in killing her. They might have plans to induce her to work with them, but not to kill her.

I myself tried to make her work with the 'Bridge Group' because she was educated and able to point out the human aspect of our cause to the Israelis. I met her in your house in Al-Ein a month before her murder. I tried to convince her of our goals which didn't contradict those of the Intifada in achieving freedom and independence. She promised to think it over in due time. But she asked me to leave her alone at the time, for she was worried because she had a problem with Abu Ra'ed. She was scared to death then," Hadi said.

"Why did you hide this information from me?"

"Till now, only the two of us know this matter."

"Why didn't you say this the day she was killed."

"Like Majid, I was afraid that people might think I had a hand in her murder."

"Is there any reason for suspecting you?"

"Only through Yusi. We were partners in the Bridge Group, and he seemed to love her. So we planned to win her over to our side and to offer another example of coexistence between the two peoples. But to be frank I was afraid of Abu Ra'ed."

"Did Abu Qais know anything of this?"

"He had faith in Majid and left the matter to him. He believed the young man would be the new leadership that might lead us to freedom."

"What role did Mohammad Wahdan play in the issue?"

"He worked with the Israeli intelligence and they had the same interests."

"Did Yusi have any relationship with Mohammad Wahdan?"

"You seem to be interrogating me! I've told you Yusi worked only with me."

"I'm not interrogating you. I'm actually cross questioning myself, my conscience and the history of my cause. Wadee'a was a scapegoat and I was involved in the conspiracy through my own stupidity and weakness. Exactly like the whole cause which has been lost and no one seems to shoulder the responsibility."

"This is what I'm actually leading up to. Try to learn a lesson



from the result and forget everything else that happened. I told you some people feed on hens and others get entangled in the fence. Wadee'a died and her secret died with her. The Israelis killed Majid and paraded his corpse along the streets of Al-Ein. If you hadn't volunteered to bury his body no one else would have ever done it. And Abu Qais was killed in the massacre in the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron. His body was buried without a head. Who has remained? Abu Ra'ed! He bought a palace in Ramallah for a million dollars."

"What about Mohammad Wahdan?"

"He stays alive, but he will win nothing, for people know about his relationship with the Israelis."

"What about you?"

"I'm not like them. I've discovered the game right from the beginning, so I've decided to go into politics."

"What about Sheikh Mohammad? Isn't he one of the remains?"

"His life or death is the same. He's counting his remaining days in Abu Rayya Center."

"Why don't you visit him?"

"I don't want to remember the past. I've heard you visit him, and that's enough."

"What about me? Why don't you consider me one of the remains?"

"You're all the remains- the remains of all those people. But eventually, you remain to be like me."

Is it true that I am eventually like him? He suffices with the result away from the past, but the past engulfs me like a spider web, and I do not reach any results. When I asked him about his wife Iman, he said, "You mean Arnuna- the tax of peace with the Isrealis. I've paid it only once. That's enough. Anyway, her cause is a common concern for both us."

"What is my business?"

"She's your friend."

"But she's your wife."

"What do you want me to do?"

"To care for her again and leave Sylvia."

"I've lost my unborn children because of her. That's enough. To comfort her, tell her that I won't marry Sylvia."

"Then, why do you live in Ramallah and Iman lives in Jerusalem?"

"This is betrayal. Arnuna gave me her body not her love."

"I don't get you."

"She offered me her body but concealed her reality."

"What's her reality?"

"She didn't tell me she was a soldier."

"That's not a secret. You should have figured it out yourself. We all know that Israeli men and women have to serve in the army."

"She didn't tell me she was raped by two soldiers, one of them was her captain. Her family didn't believe her. They thought she did it willingly. That's why she lost the case in the court against the two soldiers."

"Why are you still concerned about the incident after fifteen years of marriage? Did you expect her to be virgin?"

"I've just discovered she married me to solve her problem not because she loved me. This is her own confession."

"The bottom line is that you've married her. She sacrificed a lot for your sake. She put up with your parents' and her parents' grievances. As for the children, this is the price both of you have paid. You should have known if you were really interested in bringing about reconciliation between the two peoples that having children from a Jewish Yemeni woman who abandoned her religion was a real problem. This is utterly unacceptable in the Jewish culture. Don't also forget that the Israeli intelligence forced her to have abortions several times, and they were the ones who made her sterile."

"Please, don't defend her. I told you I want to forget the past."

"I'm defending the truth. The truth is that nobody forced you to marry her. You should have asked your questions at the outset. Why have you waited this long? Why have you concealed this information as you have hidden the secret of Wadee'a's murder? You are as accountable for

Wadee'sa's murder as well as for Arnuna's alienation. You're indeed a strange man. In Wadee'a's case you asked me to accept the result and bury the past, but in Arnuna's you try to escape the result and carry the past as a ticking machine on your shoulders."

To men like Hadi, justification is a common disease. It makes them deal with the past as they do with chess pieces. This is part of their tactics. But the result is always the same- a cucumber, once it's in one's mouth, another time, it's in one's asshole.

She put the knife on her neck and shouted, "Come closer, try to hold it." She had just finished her bath. She was still putting on a rosy robe that sent forth a sweet smell.

"Please, it's a matter of a few seconds, and your rid of me for life," she pleaded.

"The knife is in your hand. Do it yourself."

She walked toward the wall and turned the lights off.

"I beg you. Come closer and cut off my neck. Stab me in my back, in my heart. Don't hesitate. It's completely dark in here. Hadi will not come and nobody will see you."

"But I'll see myself."

"Please, it won't take more than a second and I'll feel no pain."

"Well, close your eyes and give me the knife."

Gazing at the ceiling, she raised her head.

"Listen. This is a moment during which you have to remember life. Go back to your family and start a new life."

"Hold the knife tightly, and cut my vein."

"Why do you ask me to kill the one I love?"

"To take revenge against Hadi."

"Revenge will not do you any good. In fact, your revenge against Hadi is revenge against me."

Suddenly, she stood up and embraced my neck with both arms, pressing my head against her breasts. I could feel her heartbeats running like a stream of water slithering among short grass in the early spring. I could smell her perfume coming forth as her heart throbbed. Her wet hair playfully touched my cheek arousing my manhood.

"What's that sound?" she asked when she heard the knife fall on the floor.

"It's the knife. It's dropped from my hand."

"You're like Hadi. You're not a man."

"I told you I can't do it."

"What time is it now?"

"Turn on the lights, and check the time."

She sat opposite me on a rocking chair. I lit my pipe to ease my tension. She stood up and went round the chair stretching her arms sensuously to embrace the whirls of smoke coming out from my pipe.

"Sit down and I'll tell you how to commit suicide in a way that satisfies you and relieves my conscience. Did you hear while living in Al-Ein of Imran's story?"

"No, no one told me about it."

"There's a building in Ramallah called Ramiz and Kharraz opposite Hadi's building which will be his new center. Take the back stairs and climb up to the roof. Look around. You might see Hadi while checking his building. If you see him call his name aloud. When he turns his head to the source of the sound, throw yourself into one of the two sewage holes round the building. This is the story of Imran, the idiot, who sank in the sewage hole; they threw his body near the road and took his jar. And you're idiot like Imran or like the European lady who committed suicide to take revenge against her husband. Her body was kept in the hospital till someone could identify her and pay the fee to send her body home. She was the only loser, for her husband got married before removing her body from the hospital. Do you think you will have a better fate if you kill yourself? Your suicide will be a reward for Hadi who knows how to benefit from it. Arnuna, go back to your family. You can make your return to your family and religion a story as dramatic as the story of your elopement and conversion to Islam. It will draw the Israeli and the foreign press, and you will be on the news again. I know a correspondent at Yadi'out Ahranout, which has the widest circulation in Israel. Here you go. Write down his telephone number and call him immediately. I failed to rescue Wade'a, but I don't want you to face similar fate."

The humming sound of darkness rang in my ear. A voice from deep inside me called my name. A voice I could hardly envisage, feel or smell- a mysterious, weak voice; a voice like the sound of ants when treading soft rocks; like the clatter of Majid's bones when I was looking for a place in the earth for them; like the hissing of paper scraps in my mother's kinf, shaken by distracted air; like Wadee'a's whisper while talking to her grandmother; like the sighs of Mohammad's pain and anguish when Mohammad Wahdan spit in his face; like Arnuna's heart-beats while lovingly embracing the knife. It was like all these sounds, yet it was none of them. Where are you my father? I have waited for you in the dark for three years, waiting for your flowers to celebrate my birthday. Every year you put it off till the next year. Days and years have passed by, weary and sad days, and you keep postponing it. I have begun to think you are putting it off till my wedding day. The Israelis have imposed and lifted the curfew several times, and the soldiers left the roof of the building. Other soldiers replaced them, and these left again and other ones took over. They carried with them their weapons and equipments. People celebrated their departure. You've traveled eastward and westward. You've toured round all of Palestine, from Gaza to Nazareth. And when I remind you of my birthday you keep saying, 'Wait. Our night is very long and the sun has not shone yet. Don't keep nagging. Don't interrupt my thinking. Don't spoil my pleasure while I'm enjoying my pipe, while I embrace my mother's kinf. I'm fed up with this kind of talk, dad. Do you see that old kinf? It's my wedding present. Your grandmother's soul inhabits it. It really scares me to death. I imagine spirits and ghosts coming out of it at night so I feel afraid to sleep alone in my bedroom. It's a shabby torn up thing. Many a time, I've thought to rid you and myself of it, so you may remember the present moment and celebrate my birthday. I've even thought of burning it while you're away or giving it to the sanitation boy to burn it in the garbage container. But, as soon as my hand tries to untie the knot, a terrible thrill

sweeps through my hand and body, and I imagine your voice calling out, 'Shurouq, tomorrow is quite close.' So I take pity on you and reprimand myself for such stupid ideas.

Here I am, sitting with the knife in the balcony. The camel dies but the shackle remains intact. We lose the camel, but we keep the shackle. The lion dies but the bones remain. The land is confiscated but the lotus tree grows taller. And we proceed carrying the past like a bomb about to explode on our heads.

He could not answer his daughter's questions. Is it true that all these years he could not save enough money to buy his daughter some flowers as a token of her new future? All his justifications have been exposed, and he became ashamed of himself, though he does not show it. It is obsession with justification- the age disease. What is the difference between Hadi and me? The difference lies in the reasons we give for our justifications. Yet, justification is the same. It is the way to escape confrontation with the truth, confrontation with ourselves. New thoughts cross his mind while thinking of a new justification. The fact, my daughter, is that I have deliberately put off celebrating your birthday until you are fifteen, and I become forty five. According to the occupation records, we belong to the same zodiac sign. When the official asked my father after the war about my date of birth, he answered, "It was on the twenty fifth."

"Which month?"

"I don't know. But he was born at the end of the season."

"You mean the end of the year."

"Yes."

So it was a misunderstanding between my father and the official regarding the season. My father meant the harvest season which, for him, was the end of the year. When Waheed got his ID, he was surprised to see that the date of his birth was recorded as 25th of December instead of July, the actual month his father meant. Waheed grew up with this dual birth till the day when his grandmother, Mahbouba, died on the 25th of December 1968. Then, he went to the

Birth Section in the Health Department and took a false oath that his correct date of birth was December 25th.

Since the Military Court issued its decree legalizing the confiscation of the land of 'Um Sidra', he has been trying to get a permit to reach the lotus tree which was left to him according that decree. Every week, he goes to the Military Headquarters to get an official permit. Like hundreds of other petitioners, he waits in an uncovered yard. When the soldiers open the gate, petitioners rush, each trying to be the first in the line. The soldiers begin to swear at them, and they close the gate as an act of punishment. The soldiers force the crowd to step back. Some petitioners tread on each others' feet. Some of them even fall on the floor. Then the soldiers, with their fingers on the trigger, shout at them and order them to move to the back of the yard and sit there. Two or three hours pass by before the soldiers reopen the gate. The same scene is repeated everyday. Sometimes, the petitioners who just arrive at the scene begin shouting at the others asking them to line up in order. Then those arriving late become the first in the queue while the others who came with the lark can hardly find a place in the queue.

If a petitioner is lucky he can pass through the gate by 8 o'clock. In a waiting room near the gate, an Israeli woman soldier asks every petitioner about the reason for his or her visit. They presents their ID cards and a slip of paper bearing the number and date of their appointment. The soldier clicks the computer and carelessly orders, "Come back next week." When the petitioner inquires about the day or hour when they should come back, the soldier shouts at them "I don't know. Just come back next week."

Days, weeks, months and even seasons have elapsed and Waheed has had the same reply, "Come back next week." Had the confiscation decree included the lotus tree, he would have rested at ease. But he has become like a thirsty person who, when seeing water, thinks it is close by, but when he stretches his hand to get it, a secret hand pulls it back! The land is his by birth and origin and by inheritance and

documents. He brought the official title deed from Turkey as ordered by the Israeli court. According to the title deed, all the land extending from Abu Kharuba's shrine to the demarcation line near the truce lines in the south is his. But, how come that all this land has shrunk to only one dunam around the lotus tree! Nothing can be as strange except the Military ruler's explanation, 'as large as the bull's skin' when he summoned the Mayors of Hebron and Al-Ein.

Waheed thought deeply and said, "Well, I'll do everything to keep what is left. I'll never give up. I'm sure only Mohammad Wahdan can get me the permit. And if any one finds out and blames me for that, my reply will be ready: the end justifies the means."

He seized the opportunity of Mohammad Wahdan's moving to his new house after Sheikh Mohamad had burned his old one because of his dubious relation with the enemy. It is a strange coincidence to visit Sheikh Mohammad at Abu Rayya's Center Friday morning and to visit Mohammad Wahdan in his new house Sunday evening? Well, this is life! Sometimes, one has to do things that he detests. He remembered how many times he was forced out of the line while waiting his turn in front of the Military Headquarters as those late comers forced their way into the line taking the turn of those who came early in the morning. He also remembered how those late comers swore at their fellow citizens, imitating the Israeli soldiers who accused the petitioners of not waiting in order. He remembered how he often returned home without being able to pass through the gate. He used to wait at the far back of the yard so he did not disturb the line, but more people poured into the place.

Mohammad Wahdan received him warmly and told him, "Don't feel ashamed or embarrassed. I know why you're visiting me. But I wish you did so when Sheikh Mohammad burned my house and expelled me from the village. No problem my friend, nationalists always visit spies like me in the dark so they cannot be seen. And you, Dr. Waheed, shouldn't feel embarrassed because you've visited me. I'd like to help



my fellow citizens. But I'm sure that if I liberated Palestine from the river to the sea and offered it on a silver plate to Mr. Arafat, nobody would believe me. Anyway, all those nationalists are liars and they exploit the country as a commercial commodity. They kill a person and attend his funeral. Who offered more help to the country, the organization than I? It is I who found a job for Majid, the hero of your Intifada at the time when only certain people spent all the money that should have been given to the Intifada people. It is I who helps Abu Ra'ed when he knocks at my door at midnight seeking my help to get him a permit from the Military governor to go to Tel Aviv. It is also I who got him a permit to enter the occupied territories before the Intifada. He sent me three thousand dinars, as a bribe, with his men from Amman. Is it I who accepts a bribe from a fellow citizen? Tell Abu Ra'ed it is a service Mohammad Wahdan offers for 'the beautiful eyes of the country'. I also helped Hadi to stay with his Jewish wife in Jerusalem. And you, try and ask Yasser Arafat to get you a permit! Shame on those people. Do you know that Sheikh Mohammad's father was the first to collaborate with the Israelis, and that his brother Ismael fired a few shots and ran away to Amman? He and Hadi stole all the organization's money. I swear to God that Hadi is homosexual and the woman he married is a bitch. Try to find out by yourself. I know her family. They were about to kill her, but she ran away with Hadi. And after thirty years in the organization, you appoint him your spokesman! I swear to God I haven't hurt any of my fellow citizens except Sheikh Mohammad because he personally humiliated me in front of the whole village."

"Excuse me Abu Afif. I haven't come tonight to hear all this. Sooner or later people will know the truth."

"I wish you visited me before now or at least inquired about me when Sheikh Mohammad burned my house,"

"People condemned you according to your confessions."

"What confessions! They took what they wanted out of my confessions and ignored the rest exactly like the court did to the title deed of your land."

"You admitted that you forged Abu Ra'ed's signature and sent an order in the name of the organization to Wadee'a."

"Wait a second. It's true that I put the order under her door, but it wasn't fake. It was actually written and signed by Abu Ra'ed himself."

"Do you mean that Abu Ra'ed was the one who arranged for the sudden meeting with Yusi in Tel Aviv in order to entrap Wadee'a."

"No. Abu Ra'ed only issued the order and asked me to put it under her door, and Yusi and I took care of the password. I had no idea what was meant by the password in Abu Ra'ed's letter."

"And you took pictures that hurt Wadee'a's honor in order to exploit her and force her to collaborate with the Israelis."

"Yes. But I didn't plan to give the pictures to the Israelis or anybody else."

"So, why have you done all that? You've just sworn you haven't hurt anybody. Is Wadee'a's honor so cheap? Don't you know that what you did to her was no less than murdering her? "

"If I didn't do it, the Israeli intelligence would have killed me. So I decided to opt for the lesser evil. I decided to do as ordered but I also decided not to give them the pictures. They're still with me. I can give them to you if you still don't believe me."

"In fact, I don't understand what's going on any more."

"Listen, doctor. Let's stop beating about the bush. Let's speak the Qeisiyya dialect, and forgive my frankness. Frankly, the spy is like a prostitute who sells her body to whomever pays the most. Once she does it, she loses self-control. She knows she is being exploited but she cannot complain. I'm like a prostitute, I admit. If I said no to Abu Ra'ed or to the Israelis, I'd be killed. In the issue of Wadee'a, I wanted to satisfy both in order to be safe. So I carried out Abu Ra'ed's instructions in the first part and those of the Israelis in the second. Who could I complain to? I told you I am like a prostitute who, in order to survive, has to please all customers. But tell me, are those who claim to be revolutionary better than me? What have they done? They keep

saying, "I'll keep marching carrying my machine gun." Well, they kept marching till they fell into the sewers. In fact, those people don't see their mistakes. I swear to God that had I, the spy, negotiated with the Israelis I'd have achieved better results than theirs. But, I neither sold nor got the price! We're really in a miserable situation. Hey, forget it and listen to this joke- once someone, like me, was with other people, each talking about his son. One of them said his son went to America and got a B.A. degree; another said his son went there and got an M.A; the third one said his son went there and got a Ph.D. Our friend remained silent unaware of what was going on. But, all of a sudden he said, "My son went to Germany and got a BMW." -Forgive me doctor, I think the one whose son went to Germany was the winner. Again, excuse me. It's really these dirty times that drive one crazy."

The visit resulted in arranging a meeting between Waheed and the Military governor who pretended to hear the story of the land for the first time. He told the governor he only wanted a permit that allowed him access to his land, according to the Military Court's decree. With a smile, the general said to him, "I do sympathize with you, but passing through an Israeli land is a security hazard that only the Chief Military Commander can resolve. All that I can do is to recommend that the permit be given to you even if it is only for a few hours. Come back after a month. Show this slip of paper to the guards so that you don't wait in the line!"

"Land and literature" was the topic of a seminar organized by a group of Israeli writers, Jews and Arabs, with the cooperation of the 'Bridge Group' and the House of Israeli Artists. Hadi gladly brought the invitation cards saying that in a previous meeting he raised the issues of land confiscation, title deeds, the lotus tree and obtaining permits. "Oh, this is a novel," they surprisingly said on hearing your story. "Anyway, you shouldn't hesitate, Waheed. At least, they may help you in the permit issue. They all write in Israeli newspapers that influence public opinion," Hadi encouragingly said. The first thing

that crossed Waheed's mind was the situation when he read the Waste Land to his students in the basement of Ramiz and Kharaz building. He explained its meanings and implications and its relationship with the Palestinian situation. That day, his students mocked him for he probably failed to get his point across. "How do you ask about Haja Mahbouba in this English poem? What is the relationship between her situation and the one in the poem? It is the poem of paradoxes, where spring is the cruelest season that provides nutrition to daffodils from the skulls of the dead, while living people sink in the memory of oblivion," his students wondered. Still, the paradox he is experiencing now is the strangest of all- to find his end between Hadi and Mohammad Wahdan; to give up 999 dunam, out of 1000; to seek help from Wahdan who pimped his sister to get him a permit from the Israelis who confiscated his land. What would Haja Mahbouba, who threatened Moshi Dayan that she would neither compromise nor forgive, for killing her son thirty five years ago, have said if she had seen her grandson, whom she named after his mother, beg despite all these contradictions?

Remains of conscience prick panic. But one has sometimes to do things that he does abhor. And conscience these days is like the believer's piety in a waste land. It causes nothing but pain. You do not betray your conscience if you attend the meeting, for your people practice their struggle under occupation within the context of existential reformation which is still an embryo in the womb of the future. And in order to get your shackled freedom and to get a permit to get to the lotus tree, you have to hold a dialogue with history, for your people's struggle is a dialogue between them and history, a dialogue between the beginning of your life and the end of Mahbouba's life under the lotus tree. While looking in the memory of history for a story or a thought relevant to today's topic, he found it in his mother's kin- "The Stranger and I" a short story whose writer chose from the English copy of a book on Hebrew literature and offered it to him as a present at the end of a conference on modern literature under the

title "East and West- Psychological Analysis of the Relationship between the East and the West in Modern Fiction", in the United States. Although, for a while, a semi-friendship between him and the Israeli writer seemed to grow, the occasion of offering the present was quite exciting. He discovered after reading the story that he was the 'stranger' in the story. Otherwise, how come he gave it to him as a present after he had interrupted him impolitely during his lecture. Waheed was commenting on the seduction scene between Isabel Simor and Mustafa Said in the novel 'Season of Migration to the North' by Tayeb Al-Saleh. After Isabel jokingly asked Mustafa, 'Do you know that my mother is Spanish?', her question opened up the gate of Mustafa's memory and took him back to the day when Tareq Ibn Ziyad captured Spain.

To the audience's great surprise, the Jewish writer interrupted Waheed quite bluntly. It was a strange and inappropriate interruption. Addressing Waheed as if he were representing all Arabs at all times, the writer said, "Spain is not an Arab country. You occupied Spain and claimed it was yours. Even Sudan, the country of the author is an occupied land. You occupied it from its original inhabitants, the Christian Africans." At the end of the conference, he apologized to Waheed, claiming that he did not mean him personally, but he meant the audience and the conference organizers. Then, he offered him a copy of his story, writing on top of its first page, 'To my friend, Waheed, with best wishes. Iowa City, 22 August 1985-Hanukh Partov'.

Definitely, the story was suitable for today's topic. Hanukh lives in a house he rented from the 'guardian of absentees' properties' in Jerusalem. The house was near the holy mosque, on both sides of the 1948 truce lines. Hanukh takes care of it. He paints and repairs it. One Sunday morning, he wakes up, distracted by the sudden ringing of the alarm clock. He looks out the window. He catches sight of a tall dark young man, looking directly at his window from a distance. Realizing that someone is observing him, the young man runs away.

Hanukh gets very worried, but does not feel guilty. Nothing burdens his conscience. He tries to wipe away the young man's picture from his mind, but the stranger comes back the next morning to the same place and keeps looking at the same window. Full of anxiety, Hanukh rushes to the garden to catch the man who tries to run away. But, Hanukh has made up his mind to get hold of him.

"Hey, you there. Come here. What are you doing near my house?"

"Nothing. I'm just passing by. I've stopped to cast a look."

"This is not the first time. Why do you always stand here?"

"I have nothing in mind. I'm just a passerby."

"Come in. There are two things between us that must be clarified. What relationship is there between you and my house? What would you like to see here? Why have you fallen in love with my house in particular? Listen, my dear. I don't care who you are. Just keep away from my house. I don't want you to stand opposite my window," Hanukh says while trying to hide his feeling of anxiety.

"Don't worry. I'm leaving now. Sorry to disturb you."

Heading towards the front door, the young man suddenly stops and picks up a 'copper jug' on the table and examines it curiously. Hanukh's wife has just cleaned it so the Arabic inscriptions on it have become apparent.

"A good piece of art, isn't it? My wife likes beautiful things." Hanukh commented.

"It's really very beautiful. We brought it from Afganistan," the young man said as he put it back in its place. Looking Hanukh in the eyes, he says, "Sorry to disturb you. I'm leaving for good"

That was the last time he saw the young man. Hanukh carried the jug in his overcoat's pocket and threw it away on his way to the bus station.

It was a sheer coincidence that the study day began by showing the Israeli film, 'The House', directed by Amos Hitai. In the film Dr.

Mahmoud Nashashibi, the first owner of the house before it was in the 'no-man's-land' after the 1948 war. After the 1967 war, Nashashibi visited his house, which the Jewish Agency for the State Lands sold to a Jewish professor in economics. The professor began rehabilitating the house, using skillful Arab workers whom he asked to use top-quality stones from the mountains of Hebron. During the rehabilitation process, Dr. Nashashibi appeared and showed the official title deed he had kept for so long and which proved his ownership of the house. He was mad at the workers who pulled out a side of the wooden window. "Leave it in its place. I fixed it with my own hands. It is more beautiful than your modern decoration. The house needs no renovation. It only needs to be left alone," he bitterly shouted at the workers. Then, he wiped the dust from the wooden window and laid it in the back seat of his car.

The tales of "A Thousand Nights and One Night" and that the history of land is a tale. And the tale begins, "Once upon a time, and our time and place has been usurped. The story of the house in the film is my story. It is the story of my soul. Can any person be but faithful to his soul? Nothing has frustrated me, dear writers, more than the scene in which the Arab owner of the house appears, presenting the title deed and then cleaning remains of the wooden window from the dust of irrecoverable time. He holds it in his arms as if emotionally embracing a long-lasting beloved. Carefully, he places it on the seat of his car as if apologizing to it. The one who decided that film be shown at the beginning of the conference has made me feel comfortable. He deserves my thanks for he has relieved me from the burden of narrating my own story. My story is what you have seen in the film with only one slight difference; Dr. Nashashibi visited his house and picked up the remains, part of a window to offer solace to his soul, but I have not yet collected the remains, my lotus tree!

Suddenly, Waheed stops and looks at the audience, as if trying to read the reaction of the audience on their faces. Certainly, his comment has been impressive. He has noticed Shalomit wiping her tears, nodding while looking at him. "A crazy conflict. It has to stop. I'm so glad that you have participated in this meeting. I'll help you get the permit," she promises.

"I feel sad and guilty at the same time," David says. "As a writer, I understand how the original owner feels about his house. I also understand how Waheed feels about his land. What is most noteworthy, my friends, is that their views are closer to those of an artist who reacts to the land with symbolic romanticism, while the Israeli professor envisions the house solely as an object that has an economic value. That is why the Israeli professor in the film doesn't win the



viewer's sympathy, and that is why the Israeli TV hasn't broadcast the film on its public stations. I believe that the point we have to discuss in this meeting is the context of land and literature or literature and peace as it pertains to the common denominator, if any, between Waheed and Nashashibi's view on the one hand and the Israeli professor's on the other. Allow me to draw attention here to the fact that when watching such films and hearing such stories that address the Israeli sense of guilt, many Israelis consciously try to hide this feeling through a stubborn denial of any wrong doings committed by them. They tend to adopt opposite extreme reactions as a self-defense mechanism when they see or hear whatever may stir their feelings of guilt," he continues.

"So, where is the beginning and where is the end?" Zali inquires. "Nashashibi's and Waheed's stories are those of the land and the house where we live. It is the same story of your house, David. It is also the story of the Israeli Kineset (Parliament) building and the whole of the land of Israel. If each of us returns his house to its original Arab owner, and if the State returns all the land it confiscated, what would be left to us? And where shall we go? This is exactly what has scared me when watching the film, which I believe suggests that the house must be returned to its owner."

Emil interrupts coarsely, "Stay where you are. We don't want you to leave your houses. But, Mr. Zali, you have to differentiate between Nashashibi's house and Waheed's land, between the wooden window and the lotus tree! Waheed's lotus tree is the Palestinian State with the occupied Jerusalem as its capital. As Palestinians, we hope to take shelter under that lotus tree and to have a just peace between two neighboring states on the basis of reciprocal recognition and equity. As for Nashashibi's house, it would be enough to admit that the house was his. And that he has suffered a lot and he is still suffering because you've confiscated it. Just recognize his humanity and pain, our pain."

"But you have all gone astray," Galet says. "The practical point is how can we help Waheed to get to his lotus tree," she adds. Looking at Waheed, she asks, "What do you want us to do? How can we help you without being politically criticized by Palestinians or by Israelis? I suggest that all the participants sign a declaration addressed to the Military governor and to be published in newspapers asking to revoke the confiscation decree. I also suggest that you, Waheed, write an article explaining your viewpoint and send it to the Bridge Magazine. I promise to comment on the article after it appears in the magazine. The Israeli public is ignorant of such matters and it needs a lot of illumination concerning land confiscation issues," she remarks.

The question, as Galet puts it, is, 'what can they do?' He attended the meeting without being aware of what he actually wanted. Should he ask them to give him back the 999 dunams they confiscated? Should he ask them to give him a permit to the remaining dunam? Which of these two things would be more logical and realistic? Let me ask my mother's kin, the habitat of my soul. Let me apologize to the daffodils which conceal my heart appeals behind a sheet of glass. Let me seek pardon from my daughter for breaking my promises to her and for frankly telling her that there would be no celebration under the lotus tree. I promise you, Mahmoud Maw'id, that I'll go back to my daughter this evening, as one day you returned to your children to request the daffodils to rescind their colors and break their promise if the winter departs. Let's cry together, 'Let this be the closing session'.

"The talk of land is the talk of soul," Waheed told them.

"And literature is an embodiment of the talk of soul, of that text that expresses its torture, whisper and scent that are sent forth by its mysterious cells," David said.

"So, how could we meet while you have confiscated the land and distorted the text? You have to apologize to the Palestinian people, to their collective soul, and seek its forgiveness. It may forgive you. It may shake hands with you. A historical apology may open up the door for reconciliation between the land and the text," Waheed

demands.

"I personally apologize," David reacted. "But my apology will not get you a permit, Waheed."

"It may give me a permit to have a reconciliation with my soul," Waheed responded.

On his way back to his house, he stopped at Hadi's house in Jerusalem according to a previous appointment with Arnuna. He found the door closed and a slip of paper between the hinges on which she wrote, "I'm sorry for having to leave early. I did as you advised. I contacted Yadiout Ahranout's correspondent who accompanied me to Abraham Abino's house. The journalist will publish the report in the Friday's issue because circulation would be about a million copies. I've left a copy of the key under the mat. Open the door and you can keep the key with you."

He opened the door and sat on a chair to have some rest. It was the same rocking chair in which Arnuna was sitting that night. He lit his pipe and began to rock the chair forward and backward. He imagined she was still standing in front of him with her pink robe and the knife in her hand begging him to kill her. Then, he imagined she opened her arms like a ballet dancer chasing the smoke of his pipe. What happened to Arnuna?, he asked himself. When he first met her, seven years ago, he believed she would never get old or fall in despair. She had optimistic facial features. She was truthful in her feelings. She expressed profound agony and indignation when she saw Israeli soldiers chase and fire at Palestinian children. She cried when she remembered her children that she had to abort. And because she had faith in the Palestinian cause she named herself 'Iman'. She also named her children who were born dead 'Palestine', 'Hanin' and 'Arafat'. What made her think of suicide? Did she deserve to be mistreated and deserted by Hadi? He picked up the letter which was on the table and began to read. "Dear Waheed, since I left Al-Ein to Jerusalem, I've been trying to tell you a secret. I love you. Had I met you before

meeting Hadi, I would have chosen you. But as I married Hadi I decided to be a faithful wife. You know I fought my family and the Israeli government in order to have an ideal marriage that would be a bridge between the Arabs and Jews. After settling in Jerusalem, I felt that Hadi began to change, and that he no longer loved me. But he exploited our marriage to fulfil his personal aims. His relationship with Sylvia became more and more intimate. She began to come with Hadi to our house. They used to spend long hours together in our bedroom. I reminded him of his wife who had feelings and that she might get jealous. He said his relationship with Sylvia was only one of work. I told him that work should be done in the office and not in the bedroom. He slapped me on the face, protesting that I accused him of betrayal. He called me a 'bitch'. He also said my family and society renounced me and that he married me out of pity. After that incident, I decided to treat him in the same way. I was perplexed about how to tell you about my feelings towards you. Excuse my frankness. I was merely acting that night when I pretended to commit suicide. I intended to make love with you. I was greatly disappointed when you didn't help me fulfill that wish. I wonder what you will say about me after reading this letter. Excuse me again for my frankness. A woman like me seeking her salvation would do anything, she would love, betray, take revenge, commit suicide or even lose her mind. Thanks for saving me though I'm not sure the way I've chosen is the right way of salvation. It is really strange how much you and Hadi are similar and contradictory at the same time. Had he possessed your prudence, wisdom and manners and had you had his social courage, cunning and pragmatism, you would have served your country more successfully. Finally, I say good-bye. I have no idea what fate is awaiting me, for Judaism does not respect those who convert to another religion and then readopts Judaism- Anruna."

Contrary to my custom, I visited Abu Rayya Center in the middle of the week, so I could be free on Friday to participate in the big event Hadi was preparing for. I asked the receptionist about Sheikh

Mohammad, and he told me he was not there.

"Where is he?"

"At Abu Ra'ed's house."

"Who is Abu Ra'ed?"

"I don't know. But the Sheikh was infected again by that contagious germ, and he had to be isolated from other patients. We called you but you weren't at home. So the Sheikh gave us Abu Ra'ed's telephone number. We called him and the man and his two daughters came and took the Sheikh to stay with them until he recovers."

Is Abu Ra'ed the important man who is in charge of the organization? Sheikh Mohammad never told me he and Abu Ra'ed were in contact. And I remember I've met the man, if he is the same person, only once when Majid sent him to propose, on his behalf, to Wadee'a. It was an official and cold meeting. None of us tried to know much of the other. He was a conceited man and said if Majid had not been a close friend, he would not have left his work to find him a woman. That day he left angrily as we let him down. In fact, we asked him to put the matter off upon Wadee'a's request. I don't know the man personally, but I've heard a lot about him. And what I've heard is just contradictory assessments of his character. Some think that he has been in charge of supplying the Intifada with weapons. But Hadi and Mohammad Wahdan accuse the man of corruption and of dealing with hashish. Others see him as the all-merciful father of the martyrs' sons. Still others confirm that he is that kind of person who will kill a man and then cry at his funeral, and that he assassinates his opponents and then sponsors their sons, being considered martyrs' sons! Some people in Al-Ein even accuse him of killing Wadee'a and plotting against Majid although Majid's mother confessed she collaborated with the Isrealis to save her son. Nobody knows how he escaped and moved to Ramallah where he now lives in a palace.

If the man is Abu Ra'ed himself, what shall I say to him? He knows me better than I know him. He knows that I received Majid's

remanis when neither he nor his comrades in the organization dared to do so for fear of revealing themselves. Strangely enough, he never asked about what happened to Majid's remains, though there is no risk to do so now. Shall I ask him about Wadee'a if I meet him? I do not want to accuse him but just remind him of her actions. Wadee'a was indeed a real heroine. Al-Ein had never known a more enlightened, faithful and patriotic young woman. Since her death, her colleagues and students celebrate the anniversary of her death every year. Her words in her meeting with the townswomen ignited the Intifada. She said, "Majid is a revolutionary rather than a lover, and between the two issues is a wide partition of illusion, superstitions and fears that have to be pulled down. The sole major task of the Intifada is just to do that." This has become a motto always remembered on her anniversary and on every occasion that concerns women at Al-Ein. And when young men called for establishing 'Al-Ein Society for Development' to help develop municipality services and economic resources in their town after the Intifada, Wadee'a's students and Mohammad Wahdan were the first protesters. Women protested because the Society's program did not involve items that dealt with the cause adopted by Wadee'a. If the mission meant to pull down the partition between love and the revolution, the Intifada would not come to an end for love and revolution would not cease to exist. And what is the purpose of establishing a monument commemorating Majid after burying his body in the central yard of town without mentioning Wadee'a's name? For God's sake, do you, men, still discriminate against women even in martyrdom? This is impossible! And what is the relationship between development and establishing a monument?

Young men replied that Majid's remains had priority and had to be commemorated. However, they agreed to inscribe Wadee'a's name at the base of the monument. As for 'development', it is a catchy word that will attract consuls of donor countries to the place and convince their governments to raise funds. As Wadee'a's brother,

some young men contacted me to settle the conflict. Unintentionally, I suggested to meet in Wadee'a's room in our old house. The room had been deserted for five years since her death. Five of Wadee'a's students and colleagues and five men representing the Society's founders came to the meeting. A quiet debate and understanding overwhelmed the place, so it was not difficult to agree on reburying Majid's remains, establishing the monument, and establishing a center for women bearing the name 'Wadee'a Center for Women Development'. I imagined Wadee'a as a butterfly hovering over our heads, a child whose hand I firmly clasp to prevent her from following her grandmother to the grave. I remembered my words to her, "Wadee'a, your grandma is going on a short journey- a journey just to her grave. You're the one who must be entrusted with her heritage." I announced that Wadee'a's will was to change her house into a center for the Society. We all rejoiced and left the room, reiterating "The struggle will continue..."

"Why's Mohammad Wahdan objecting?" I asked the young men.

"This is a name that rouses disgust. He's an 'important' member of the appointed council, and he's assigned tremendous influence and privileges by the military mandate. He still considers himself the legitimate authority in the town. He says that burying Majid's remains and building the monument will not take place without the council's official consent. On our part, we will not seek an agent's consent," they replied.

"What is the opinion of the organization's leadership?" I inquired.

"The leadership is the real problem. Only one person has complete influence. He's called Abu Ra'ed. He backs up Mohammad Wahdan's view under the pretext that dismissing Wahdan from the council would create internal conflicts. 'Eventually, do you want grapes or to fight the warden?' Abu Ra'ed told us when we discussed the issue with him," they remarked.

"What do you think of Abu Ra'ed's attitude? Why don't you listen to him- take the grapes and postpone fighting the warden till

the time is ripe!" I then suggested.

"We want both this time. We'll never seek the agent's permission at the expense of our conflict with the leadership. We'll build the monument in front of their very eyes. If Mohammad Wahdan is a man let him try to stop us. Damn it- Mohammad Wahdan before the Intifada and Mohammad Wahdan after the Intifada. "What's a vicious circle!" they confidently replied.

What if I told those young men that it was Mohammad Wahdan who had helped Majid, the martyr they wanted to commemorate, to get a job in Tel Aviv to secure weapons for the revolution, regardless of the means, being ethical or not. I was only worried lest they would probably misunderstand me, and that I might defame the martyr's name. And what if I told them that Abu Ra'ed and Mohammad Wahdan had some common interests at the time, and that they (the young men) unduly complicated issues.

When they mentioned the name of Abu Ra'ed, I knew that Mohammad Wahdan was not alone in the field. He must have been backed up by some influential person; otherwise, how could he object to the young men's suggestion quite frankly? It could not be the Military Governor, of course. The Governor's support would not do him any good in his confrontation with the young men. It's really stupid. Why don't the young men read Abu Ra'ed's message with a critical mind? The issue has become more complex than what they imagined. Mohammad Wahdan, the emblem of cowardice, challenges them now because he has the full support of the legitimate authority!

I really regretted not asking them these questions. Had I done so, I could have helped the whole town and the organization avoid the problem. The next morning, when building the monument was supposed to start, some young men representing the organization occupied the central yard and prevented anybody from approaching the area. Their justification was that the leadership had not yet approved the project, and that no one should violate its instructions. A heated



debate broke out between the supporters of building the monument and those who opposed it without Abu Ra'ed consent. The argument was about to develop into a fist fight.

"How much does Abu Ra'ed pay you every month?"

"Shut up. You talk to us as if we were agents."

"Why? Is the someone who gets money from Abu Ra'ed, an agent?"

"Shut up, we said. He is much better than you."

"People of Mecca know its paths better. Abu Ra'ed gives orders from his palace in Ramallah and he doesn't know what happens in Al-Ein."

"We won't approve of violating the leadership's instructions."

"Well, let's seek the townspeople's opinion. After all, Majid is the son of the whole town before being the organization's son."

"Even seeking the townspeople's opinion requires Abu Ra'ed approval."

This is what happened. The organization was torn into two parties, 'P' and 'B'. The former considered itself the sole, legitimate representative of the organization in the whole town, while the latter objected to the centrality of the decision of 'P'. 'B' also called for new elections to choose a new leadership as a pre-condition for national unity. Thus, every party accused the other of collaboration with Israel. And a person could not afford not to belong to one of the parties, for just walking on the street had a political implication. If you take the Jora Street heading westward down to the Rawazin neighborhood, you were inevitably associated with 'P' group. But if you visited a relative or a friend passing through Al-Deir Street eastward near the mill, you were classified as a member of 'B', and as such you are against Abu Ra'ed's 'legitimate' leadership.

"Well, what is the solution?" I asked the people at Wadee'a Center for Women Development. "We've honored Wadee'a. It's really shameful not to honor Majid. It's a shame that will smirch our history, values and revolution if we leave Majid's bones clatter in the sack without finding someone who will bury them and honor them.

I'll shoulder the responsibility toward Majid as I did toward Wadee'a. He was one of my students and friends. He was about to become my brother-in-law. More importantly, he is my brother citizen," I added.

"I found it, I found it," I'tidal interposed. "We'll get something from 'P' and something from 'B' and invent 'C', so we become a body independent of the two. Acts of burial and honor can thus be done in 'The Seventh Martyr Graveyard', near Abu Qais and Wadee'a and the other martyrs. Let's forget about the monument and let 'P' and 'B' fight together as long as they wish. A martyr is honored in hearts and not with stones and celebrations funded by a foreign consulate. Let the Society use the money to clean up the piles of garbage in the town streets."

"A wonderful idea, but its application will not be without problems," I commented.

"What problems? I'tidal inquired.

"The Israeli authorities released Majid's corpse under very stringent conditions. They required that the corpse be buried after midnight and without mourning or any other rituals. I had no other alternative but to accept. The authorities believed that the body was buried accordingly. Since then, great changes took place. Otherwise, how come the organization is split into two parties. The conflict is not only about the monument or honoring martyrs but about who takes the decision and issues the approval. The problem is that taking the decision is indeed beyond the power of the two parties. What can they do but merely submit an application to the Israeli Military Governor via Mohammad Wahdan. Do you understand what I mean, I'tidal?" I explained.

"Yes, I do. It seems there are no men left in the whole town after the death of Majid and the wounding of Sheikh Mohammad. Swear to God, no one but the women will bury Majid's remains. Just leave it to us. We don't seek a monument. We'll post Majid's picture near that of Wadee'a's on the facade of the Center. It's a pity to seek Mohammad Wahdan's help to get permission to honor our martyrs. Damn the agent! You, men, have a short-term memory and you soon

forget history. Excuse me, doctor, despite your wide knowledge you don't know that Mohammad's father was an Israeli agent before the occupation. He led the Jews during their attack at the Rahwa Police Station, and he was imprisoned in Jordan. He was accused of infiltrating the borders and smuggling goods! Ask the old men in the town and they will tell you the truth. And we, women have to tell the truth. The truth is "the fox only begets a bosh". Does the organization expect the fox to beget a cub! The revolution has passed from here quite rapidly. It has taken the martyrs but left Mohammad Wahdan!" I tided bitterly said.

"And it has also dropped the 'z' letter from the name 'Kharaz' (when the 'z' is dropped, the remaining word 'khara' means 'shit'). It seems it will end in utter shit!" she added.

"Say it. Don't feel shy. Don't hesitate. The end will be khara. But let's go back to the main issue, which is honoring the martyr whose bones have not been buried yet. On my way back to Ramallah, I'll visit Ramiz and Kharaz's building to erase the slogan so the name of the building will retain its original meaning!" I promised.

I dialed the number Sheikh Mohammad had left me with the receptionist. The woman who answered told me, after introducing myself, that Abu Ra'ed was not there. But, she described the way to his house.

When I arrived at the house, the Sheikh, with eyes full of tears, asked, "Why are you so late?"

"I've gone early to the Center, but you were not there."

"The damned germ is chasing me as if I haven't had enough. Tell me, do you think that one day I'll stand on my feet?"

When I was asked this question, I lied. Doctors said his case was hopeless. He needed a miracle to recover. I had to lie to keep him hopeful.

"Do you know why I want to stand on my feet even for one day? To expose the Fateh Party to the entire country."

"A man like you doesn't do that to Fateh."

"Swear to God, if the Israeli intelligence interrogated me now, I would even lie and confess against all those who call themselves leaders in order to put them in jail and rid the people of them. Not one of them has ever paid me a visit. They've only saved Mohammad Wahdan's life as if they're planning another conspiracy with him."

"I don't know what you mean by leaders and leaderships. If you mean the leadership of the organization, so here you are- you're Abu Ra'ed's guest. You're staying in his grand palace and his wife and daughters are attending you. Tell me, you know Abu Ra'ed better than anybody else. I've heard from some people in the town that he's playing with fire."

"Don't believe them. They always exaggerate and launch accusations haphazardly. No doubt, he's a harsh man. But this is only for the sake of the organization and the public interest. If he hadn't smuggled weapons to the young men, the Intifada would have come to an end in the first three months. He's the only one who takes care of the disabled of the Intifada, and he collects money to send them abroad for medical treatment."

"Well, why then do you complain about being deserted by the leadership?"

"I don't know. I really don't know what I want. I want to commit suicide. I can't tolerate my condition. I can't stand the thought of my being unable to walk anymore, and to be a cumbersome burden depending on others. I can't bear being unable to participate in the struggle. I can't stand Mohammad Wahdan's spitting in my face and being unable to defend myself. At the same time, no one from the organization offers me protection. Honestly, I want to commit suicide. Please help me," he said this with a suppressed voice.

I looked at his face and I imagined he was a bomb about to explode in my hands.

"I want to commit suicide. Please do me a favor. Fill my chair with explosives and push me toward a group of Israeli soldiers or

throw me under one of their tanks, or let me explode myself in front of Hadi's building. You would do it if you were a man. Go back to Al-Ein and I'll tell you where you can find the explosives," he bitterly begged.

"The moment I came here, I could feel how depressed you are. I saw tears in your eyes. Tell me, has anybody bothered you? Has Mohammad Wahdan visited you again? Or, is it that you're not happy here?" I asked.

"Not at all. I just hate living like this."

"A person like you, Mohammad, doesn't commit suicide. A person like you must live. You're a true believer, and a true believer doesn't kill himself. And when you carried your weapon you didn't do so for the sake of Hadi, Abu Ra'ed or Mohammad Wahdan. Don't compare yourself with those remains. Compare yourself with Majid, Wade'a and Abu Qais who died like martyrs. Don't panic because you're paralyzed. The whole country has become paralyzed, and we can't find a wheelchair like yours to accommodate it."

"Well, am I going to walk on my legs?"

"I hope so."

"Do you think I'll go back to Al-Ein and tread on Mohammad Wahdan's head with my feet?"

"I hope so."

"Please, tell me the truth. What do doctors exactly say about my condition."

"They say it would be impossible for you to recover completely. This requires a miracle like those of Jesus Christ. But, they say there is big hope, if you could have medical treatment abroad, that your right leg becomes normal and you may be able to move your left leg and one of your arms. I'tidal, the new head of Wade'a Center, and I went to Maqasid Hospital and the doctors who took care of your treatment were optimistic. They told us about successful surgical operations performed in America in which new cells can be planted in the spinal cord to reduce paralysis in the patient's limbs. It is pos-

sible that this method of treatment will become common in a few years. So, don't despair, Mohammad, and forget about committing suicide. Our people are still ready to offer all possible help. I know a lot of young men in the organization who are ready to sacrifice their lives for your treatment. Unfortunately, those are still chased and they can't visit you. But they can offer you financial support. A new center has been established in Al-Ein bearing Wadee'a's name. It's like a pearl that would be the best achievement of the Intifada if it were taken care of adequately. The women in the center hold campaigns to raise money for people injured during the Intifada. So please don't lose hope."

Don't ask me about what is going on, for I have no idea. Ask me about what happened and I would open up the past to you. I had known God before you did. I prayed in the mihrab\* of my mother's kinf in a night which was worth a thousand nights and one night of yours. Who are you, son of a bitch, who wants to share my mother's kinf in the innermost of my soul? You, who sits beside me, turn your face away from me, for I can no longer stand your yellow smile. Close your eyes before the devil gushes out of them and confiscates the remains of my conscience. "Dad, I hate Hadi. Tell him not to come to our house." Here he is. He and his wife appear on the front page of Free Opinion newspaper. They're walking side by side on the Dead Sea beach. On the last page, his wife appears at Abraham Abino's house while receiving a copy of the Torah after the court has acknowledged her Judaism. Certainly, Sylvia was the one who translated the report from Yadiout Ahranout newspaper and put it as the main headline: '15 years as a Muslim: The forty-year-old lady relates her story'.

"She lived as a country Muslim woman in an Arab village in Mount Hebron. She called herself 'Iman'. Like a real Arab country woman, she wore an embroidered dress and covered her head with a scarf. She baked bread in the taboun\*, and she got water out of a well and bathed in a washtub once a week. She also burnt wood to heat her house in winter. During the Intifada, she kept to her house for a week under curfew and she smelled tear gas. She also hid in a cave when she heard the sound of shelling in the street. "The army threw tear gas grenades inside and on the roof of my house. I was scared to go out at night," she said.

"This week the secular courts in Jerusalem acknowledged her Judaism allowing her to start a new civilized life. The forty-year-old

lady requests that her past be burned and its ashes be thrown on Mount Hebron. "I want to live like a human being. Once during the curfew, the soldiers entered my house and I was scared to death while they were searching under the bed, in the cupboard and in the kitchen. Suddenly, one soldier found a Hebrew woman's magazine. He asked me in Hebrew, "What is this?" I told him I'm Jewish and presented my ID.

"How would you feel if we found weapons in your house?" the officer asked while looking at me admirably and with great surprise.

"I want to run away from this village but I'm afraid of my family and the intelligence," I answered while gripped by fear.

"She met her husband, Hadi, in Asqalan fifteen years ago. They got married in a hotel on the Dead Sea beach. She was pretty and loved life. A few years before getting married to that Arab, she served in the armed forces for two years. She also spent a year in a military school for officers and worked as a jail warden in Tritsa prison," the news report continued.

"During this period, my family practiced all kinds of pressure on me, for they were fanatic right wingers and they didn't let me leave the house without their permission. They tried to make me marry by force, and their pressure continued even after I went to live alone. I didn't feel my parents' kindness when I was fourteen. This could be because I was raped by some soldiers while I was serving in the armored forces, and that those soldiers who only received very light sentences accused me of seducing them. In one of our fights, my mother stabbed me with a knife in my back trying to kill me. My family forced me to marry a Yemeni who was twenty years older than me. I discovered he was a crook and addict, so I divorced him after giving up all my rights and properties. Disgrace and shame made me marry the Arab called Hadi when I had the chance," Arnuna explained.

"Jewish religious men usually put obstacles in the way of those



women who convert to another religion and wish to readopt Judaism. So women like you would prefer hell to returning to this religion and this Israeli society. Many become prostitutes. Do you know what's awaiting you after your return?"

"Thank God, I've returned to my religion. I'm ready to tolerate everything they will do to me, even if my people call me 'adulteress'. I don't think there is a worse hell than living among those Arabs. During my stay with them, my mother-in-law always called me 'prostitute'. And when a young man from the village was shot dead, they asked me what I thought of what my people did to their sons. I told them I was one of them, but they shook their heads and said in their dialect 'sharmouta.'"

So, where is the truth, my mother's kinf?- the truth of events, characters and objects. All remains in you will not save me from your fringes which, like a spider web, are about to strangle me while fumbling inside you trying to stir my wounded dreams, broken hopes and shattered things. How can I find my lotus tree in this wreckage? How can I pick up the flowers of my dreams and water them with the tears Wadee'a had shed on her grandmother's departure and with the drops of rain that awaken the memory of the dead to make a wreath and give it as a present to my daughter on her birthday?! Hadi's voice goes up and down and knocks at the walls of my consciousness with an iron hammer. 'Oslo' has given us the identity we're trying to embody through this center. It has given us the lotus tree that will shelter us when the land cries for protection from the stifling heat of the sun. This is not our grand dream, but it is a dream.

The alarm clock suddenly rang so strongly and stubbornly that I felt the fringes of the kinf shaken." Come here, Shurouq and sit beside me," I asked my daughter while rubbing my eyes as if the ringing of the clock interrupted my long dream and awoke me.

"Take this kinf and burn it. Rid us of its nightmares."

"It no longer bothers me, dad. The night is long and Shehrizad has not stopped telling her tales. The clock has rung. Let's keep it dad. It's a piece of art that decorates the window."

Hadi and three Palestinian soldiers rang the doorbell. Hadi sat beside me and asked the soldiers to untie the kinf from the window bars and take it to his center.

"No, you won't take my father's kinf," Shurouq shouted at the soldiers. "You won't take it...you won't take it. Hadi, I hate you...I do hate you...go away," she cried while pressing the kinf to her chest.

The soldiers pulled the kinf away from her hands. She shook her head as if giving up. "Dad, why haven't you defended yourself. Why have you let them take it? Speak up...Do something."

I walked toward her in the middle of the balcony and took her in my arms. I kissed her forehead as if apologizing for what happened. I could feel the censure in her eyes when she looked up at me. I could see the picture of my face in her eyes. "Let them take it...Let them take it...What is the use? Preoccupation with the past is the same as preoccupation with justification. Both may cause death. We've been dreaming for a long time. Our dream has been as long as our night. It has come like rough waves that wrecked our boat and drowned us. Don't regret because we dreamed, for the dream still has remains, and the kinf still has stories, but Shehrizad falls asleep at dawn and she wants to rest for a while. So go ahead, and enjoy your dream, sweet-heart, so we can celebrate your birthday under the lotus tree. Then, Shehrizad will wake up again because the dream will still have remains..."

## Glossary

**kinf:** a colored sack, hand-woven from sheep wool and usually offered as a wedding present by a mother/father to a son/daughter

**Ramadan:** the lunar month when Muslims fast from dawn till sunset

**The Night of Power:** called 'lailatu-lqadr' in Arabic, which is expected during the last ten days of Ramadan and Muslims celebrate by praying to God and imploring Him to forgive their sins and realize their wishes

**zamzam:** a well in the holy Mosque of Mecca. Muslim pilgrims use its sacred water for ablution and carry some with them home.

**dabour:** wasp

**dabka:** a Palestinian folkloric dance which is usually performed (by men and/or women) in weddings and national festivals.

**dalouna:** a Palestinian folkloric song that usually accompanies the dabka.

**yamma:** mother

**come out inside:** because the Israeli soldier did not speak Arabic well, he said the phrase that way. He meant to say 'go inside your house'.

**Saqr Al-Hroub:** saqr means hawk; al-hroub means wars.

**amara:** the Mayor's headquarter building. During the Israeli occupation it was used as the Military Governor's headquarters.

**sura:** a chapter in the Quran

**Al-Safa wal-Marwa:** two places where Muslim pilgrims walk fast between them for seven times as one of the pilgrimage rituals

**muathen:** the person who calls for prayer

**sakani:** grey. In the given joke it is used as pun where it means 'populated area'.

**kufiya:** an Arab national headdress some old Palestinians still wear but is worn by most people in the Gulf States

**awiha:** a loud cry of joy that accompanies women's singing in weddings and national festivals

**jaaha:** the group of remarkable people who, on behalf of a would-be groom, visits the house of the woman he wants to betroth.

**nargila:** water pipe; hubble-bubble

**mihrab:** a niche in a mosque where the imaam (sheikh) leads a payer

**sharmouta:** prostitute

**taboun:** a baking oven used by villagers

"Ahmad Harb's *Remains* is a brilliant novel, immersing the reader in the daily life of Palestine under Israeli military occupation, a daily life which often merges with a surrealist sense of absurdity and unreality. With a vivid sense of character, scene, and poetic language, *Remains* evokes an entire world of love, suffering, and humor that resists erasure and guarantees the immortality of the Palestinian experience"

W. J. T. Mitchell Prof. of English and History of University of Chicago, editor of *Critical Inquiry*.

"The *Remains* brings the reader the myths of ancient Palestine to today's hollow political slogans and the myths of the Intifada. Like the narrator of 'The Waste Land,' Harb's narrator sees through the myths, which no longer have meaning, yet he struggles to salvage some remnant of values out of his surroundings and history. His narrative becomes a testimony to his success..."

Lynne Rogers, The *Remains* of 'The Waste Land': T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' and Ahmad Harb's *The Remains*, *Critique: Critical Eastern Studies* (Spring 2003), 12 (1), 5-24

# REMAINS