Returning to Haifa

1 When he reached the edge of Haifa, approaching by car along the Jerusalem road, Said S. had the sensation that something was binding his tongue, compelling him to keep silent, and he felt grief well up inside of him. For one moment he was tempted to turn back, and without even looking at her he knew that his wife had begun to cry silently. Then suddenly came the sound of the sea, exactly the way it used to be. Oh no, the memory did not return to him little by little. Instead, it rained down inside his head the way a stone wall collapses, the stones piling up, one upon another. The incidents and the events came to him suddenly and began to pile up and fill his entire being. He told himself that Safiyya, his wife, felt exactly the same, and that was why she was crying.

Ever since he left Ramallah that morning he had not stopped talking, nor had she. Beneath his gaze, the fields sped by through the windshield, and the heat was unbearable. He felt his forehead catch fire, exactly like the burning asphalt beneath the car's wheels, while above him the sun, the terrible June sun, spilled the tar of its anger upon the earth.

All along the way he talked and talked and talked. He spoke to his wife about everything—about the war and about the

defeat, about the Mandelbaum Gate, demolished by bulldozers. And about the enemy, who reached the river, then the canal, then the edge of Damascus in a matter of hours.[1] And about the ceasefire, and the radio, and the way the soldiers plundered belongings and furniture, and the curfew, and his cousin in Kuwait consumed with anxiety, and the neighbor who gathered his things and fled, and the three Arab soldiers who fought alone for two days on the hill near Augusta Victoria Hospital, and the men who took off their army uniforms and fought in the streets of Jerusalem, and the peasant who was killed the minute they saw him near the largest hotel in Ramallah. His wife spoke of many other matters. Throughout the entire journey neither of them stopped talking. Now, as they reached the entrance to Haifa, they both fell silent. At that moment they both realized that they had not spoken a word about the matter which had brought them there.

This is Haifa, then, twenty years later.

Noon, June 30, 1967. The car, a gray Fiat bearing white Jordanian license plates, was traveling north, across the plain which was called Ibn Amar twenty years ago.[2] It ascended the coastal road toward the southern entrance to Haifa. When the car crossed the road and entered the main street, all the walls came down and the road dissolved behind a film of tears. He heard himself say to his wife, "This is Haifa, Safiyya!"

The steering wheel felt heavy between his palms, which had begun to sweat more profusely than they ever had before. It occurred to him to say to his wife, "I know this Haifa, but it refuses to acknowledge me." However, he changed his mind and after a moment a thought struck him, and he said to her:

"You know, for twenty long years I always imagined that the Mandelbaum Gate would be opened some day, but I never, never imagined that it would be opened from the other side. It never entered my mind. So when they were the ones to open it, it seemed to me frightening and absurd and to a great degree humiliating. Maybe I'd be crazy if I told you that doors should always open from one side only, and that if they opened from the other side they must still be considered closed. But nevertheless, that's the truth."

He turned toward his wife, but she wasn't listening. She was turned away from him, absorbed in gazing at the road—now to the right, where the farmland stretched away as far as one could see, and now to the left, where the sea, which had remained so distant for more than twenty years, was raging near at hand. Suddenly she said:

"I never imagined that I would see Haifa again."

He said:

"You're not seeing it. They're showing it to you."

With that, Safiyya's nerves failed her for the first time and she shouted:

"What's all this 'philosophy' you've been spouting all day long? The gates and the sights and everything else. What happened to you?"

"What happened to me?"

He said it to himself, trembling. But he took control of his nerves and continued to speak to her quietly.

"They opened the border as soon as they completed the occupation, suddenly and immediately. That has never happened in any war in history. You know the terrible thing that happened in April 1948, so now, why this? Just for our sakes alone?[3] No! This is part of the war. They're saying to us, 'Help yourselves, look and see how much better we are than you, how much more developed. You should accept being our servants. You should admire us.' But you've seen it yourself. Nothing's changed. It was in our power to have done much better than they did."

"Then why did you come?"

He looked at her angrily and she fell silent.

She knew. Why did she need to ask? She was the one who told him to come. For twenty long years she avoided talking about it, twenty years. Then the past erupted as though forced out by a volcano.

As he drove the car through the center of Haifa, the smell of war was still strong enough to make the city seem to him dark and excited and agitated, the faces harsh and savage. After a little while he realized that he was driving the car through Haifa with the feeling that nothing in the streets had changed. He

used to know Haifa stone by stone, intersection by intersection. How often he had crossed that road in his green 1946 Ford! Oh, he knew Haifa well, and now he felt as though he hadn't been away for twenty years. He was driving his car just as he used to, as though he hadn't been absent those twenty bitter years.

The names began to rain down inside his head as though a great layer of dust had been shaken off them: Wadi Nisnas, King Faisal Street, Hanatir Square, Halisa, Hadar[4] . . . The events mixed together suddenly, but he held himself together and asked his wife in a barely audible voice:

"Well, where shall we begin?"

She was quiet. He heard her crying softly, almost silently, and he calculated to himself the suffering she was enduring. He knew he couldn't really comprehend that suffering precisely, but he did know it was very great, and that it had remained so for twenty years. Now it was welling up like some incredible monster inside of her, in her head, in her heart, in her memories, in her imagination, controlling her entire future. He was amazed that he had never thought about what that suffering must have meant to her, and about the extent to which it was buried in the wrinkles of her face and in her eyes and in her mind. It was with her in every bite of food she took and in every hut where she had lived and in every look she cast at her children and at him and at herself. Now all of it was bursting forth from the wreckage and the oblivion and the pain, to carry away the mass of bitter defeat he had tasted at least twice in his lifetime.

All at once the past was upon him, sharp as a knife. He was turning his car at the end of King Faisal Street (for him, the street names had never changed) toward the intersection that descends left to the port and right to the road leading to Wadi Nisnas when he saw a group of armed soldiers standing in front of an iron barricade at the intersection. As he watched them out of the corner of his eye, a sound like an explosion burst out from the distance. Then a crack of gunfire, and the steering wheel began to tremble between his hands. He nearly ran up onto the sidewalk, but at the last moment he recovered himself and saw a young boy dashing across the road. With that scene

the terrible past came back to him in all its tumultuousness. For the first time in twenty years he remembered what happened in minute detail, as though he were reliving it again.

Morning, Wednesday, April 21, 1948. Haifa, the city, was not expecting anything, in spite of the fact that it was filled with dark tension.

Thunder came abruptly from the east, from the heights of Mount Carmel. Mortar shells flew across the city's center, pelting the Arab quarters.

The streets of Haifa turned into chaos. Alarm swept through the city as it closed its shops and the windows of its houses.

Said S. was in the center of town when the sounds of shots and explosions started to fill the sky above Haifa. Up until noon he hadn't expected that this would be the all-out attack, so it wasn't until then that he tried to return home in his car, but he soon discovered that this was impossible. He went down the side streets in an attempt to cross the road to Halisa, where he lived, but the fighting had already spread, and he saw armed men racing from side street to main road and from main road to side street. They moved in obedience to instructions blaring from loudspeakers placed here and there. After a while Said felt he was rushing helter-skelter, yet the alleyways, closed off by machine guns or bullets or the soldiers themselves, seemed to be pushing him unconsciously in one direction only. Over and over as he tried to return to his real direction, picking out a particular alley, he found himself pushed by an unseen force toward one road only, the road to the coast.

He had married Safiyya a year and four months before and had rented a house in a neighborhood he figured would be safe. But now he felt he wouldn't reach it. He knew his young wife wouldn't be able to cope. Ever since he had brought her from the country she'd been unable to deal with city life or get used to all the complications which seemed to her terrifying and insoluble. What would happen to her now, he wondered?

He was lost, nearly. He didn't know exactly where or how the fighting was taking place. As far as he knew, the British still controlled the city and this whole situation should have taken

place in approximately three weeks, when the British would begin to withdraw in accordance with the date they had fixed.

As he quickened his pace he knew for certain that he had to avoid the high sections of town adjoining Herzl Street, where the Jews had been headquartered from the beginning. But he also had to stay away from the business district between Halisa and Allenby Street, for that was the Jews' strongest arms base.

So he sped along trying to circle around the business district in order to reach Halisa. Before him was the road that ends at Wadi Nisnas and passes through the Old City.

All of a sudden things got mixed up and the names became tangled up in his head: Halisa, Wadi Rushmiyya, the Burj, the Old City, Wadi Nisnas.[5] He felt completely lost, that he had even lost his sense of direction. The explosions intensified. Even though he was far enough away from the site of the shooting he could still make out British soldiers who were boarding up some windows and opening others.

Somehow he found himself in the Old City and from there he raced with a strength he didn't know he possessed toward South Stanton Street. And then he knew he was less than two hundred meters away from Halul Street, and he began to catch the scent of the sea.

At that exact moment he remembered little Khaldun, his son who was five months old that very day, and a dark apprehension suddenly spread over him. It was the one taste that never left his tongue right up to this moment, twenty years after it happened for the first time.

Had he expected that disaster? The events were mixed up, the past and present running together, both in turn jumbled up with the thoughts and illusions and imaginings and feelings of twenty successive years. Had he known? Did he sense the calamity before it happened? Sometimes he told himself, "Yes, I knew it even before it happened." Other times he said, "No, I only imagined it after it happened. I couldn't possibly have expected anything as horrifying as that."

Evening began to settle over the city. He didn't know how many hours had passed as he rushed from street to street, but it was clear that he was being propelled toward the port. All the side streets leading off the main road were closed. He kept plunging

down side streets trying to get to his house, but he was always driven back, sometimes by rifle muzzles, sometimes by bayonets.

The sky was on fire, crackling with shots, bombs and explosions, near and far. It was as though the very sounds themselves were pushing everyone toward the port. Even though he could not concentrate on anything specific, he couldn't help but see how the throng of people thickened with every step. People were pouring from the side streets into the main street leading down to the port—men, women and children, empty-handed or carrying a few small possessions, crying or being floated along in a paralyzed silence in the midst of the clamor and confusion. He was swallowed up in the rushing wave of humanity and lost the ability to direct his own steps. He kept remembering that he was being swept along by the dazed and crying throng toward the sea, unable to think about anything else. In his head was one picture only, suspended as though hanging on a wall: his wife Safiyya and his son Khaldun.

The moments passed slowly, relentlessly, making it seem like an incredibly severe nightmare. He went through the iron gate to the port where British soldiers were restraining people. From the gate he could see masses of people tumbling one over the other, falling into the small rowboats waiting near the wharf.[6] Without really knowing what he ought to do, he decided not to get into a rowboat. Then, like someone who suddenly goes insane or someone whose senses return all at once after a long period of insanity, he turned and began pushing through the throng with every ounce of strength he could muster, to forge a path through their midst, in the opposite direction, back toward the iron gate.

Like someone swimming against a torrent of water plummeting down a lofty mountain, Said forged ahead, using his shoulders and forearms, his thighs, even his head. The current carried him a few steps backward, but he pushed on wildly like some hunted creature hopelessly trying to forge a path through a thick tangle of undergrowth. Above him the smoke and the wailing of bombs and hail of gunfire fused with the screams, the footsteps, the sea's pounding, and the sound of oars slapping the surface of the waves . . .

Could twenty years really have passed since then?

Cold sweat poured down Said's forehead as he drove the car up the slope. He hadn't counted on the memory coming back full of the same insane turmoil that rightfully belonged only to the actual moments of the experience itself. He looked at his wife out of the corner of his eye. Her face was tense and pale, her eyes brimming with tears. Surely, he said to himself, she must be going back over her own steps that same day when he was as close as possible to the sea and she was as close as possible to the mountain, while between the two of them terror and destruction lengthened their unseen steps through the quagmire of screams and fear and uncertainty.

She had, so she had told him more than once over the past years, been thinking about him. When the shots rang out and people burst out with the news that the English and the Jews had begun to overrun Haifa, a desperate fear came over her.

She had been thinking about him when the sounds of war reached her from the center of town, for she knew he was there. She felt safe, so she remained in the house for a while. As his absence lengthened, she hurried out to the road without knowing exactly what she wanted to do there. At first she had looked out from the window, then from the balcony. Then she sensed that the situation had altered, for at noon fire began to pour down profusely from behind, from the hills above Halisa. She felt besieged all around, and only then did she dash down the steps and along the road toward the main street. The urgency of her desire to see him coming was a measure of her fear for him and her worry over the uncertain fate which carried a thousand possibilities with every shot fired. When she reached the top of the road, she quickly began to search the cars filing by, her steps guiding her from car to car and from person to person, asking questions without receiving a single answer. Suddenly she found herself in the middle of a wave of people pushing her as they themselves were being pushed from all over the city in a massive, unstoppable, powerful stream. She was carried along like a twig of straw.

How much time passed before she remembered that the infant Khaldun was still in his crib in Halisa?

She didn't remember exactly, but she knew that some staggering force rooted her to the ground, while the endless flow of people streamed by her and around her as though she were a tree surrounded by a flood of rushing water. She turned back, resisting the flood with all her strength. Weak and exhausted, she began to shout with all her might, but her words failed to rise above the ceaseless clamor to reach any ear. She repeated a thousand times, a million times, "Khaldun! Khaldun!" For months her injured voice remained hoarse, barely audible. That name, Khaldun, was the one unchanging note floating wretchedly in the midst of that endless torrent of voices and names.

She was on the verge of falling among the trampling feet when she heard, as though in a dream, a voice well up out of the ground, calling her name. When she saw his face behind her—dripping with sweat, rage, oppression—she was more horrified than ever. Sorrow pierced her, swept over her, filled her with boundless determination, and she resolved to return, no matter what the price. Perhaps she felt that she would never again be able to look Said in the eye, or let him touch her. In the depths of her soul she felt she was about to lose them both—Said and Khaldun. She forged her way through, using all the strength in her arms, through the jungle blocking her return, trying at the same time to lose Said, who was alternately calling, "Safiyya! Khaldun! . . ."

Did centuries pass, and destinies, before she felt his two strong, rigid hands fasten about her arms?

Then she looked into his eyes and, paralyzed, collapsed against his shoulder like a worthless scrap of cloth. Around them passed the flood of humanity, pushing them from side to side, forcing them along toward the shore, but beyond that they were incapable of feeling anything at all until they were splashed by spray flying up from the oars and they looked back toward shore to see Haifa clouding over behind the evening's dusk and the twilight of their tears . . .

All the way from Ramallah to Jerusalem to Haifa he talked about everything, without stopping for a moment. But when he reached the entrance to Bat Gallim,[7] silence bound his tongue. Here he was in Halisa, listening to the sound his car wheels always made when they turned. The furious beating of his agitated heart made him lose himself from time to time. Twenty years of absence had dwindled away and suddenly, incredibly, things were right back to where they had been, despite all reason and logic. What could he be looking for?

A week ago, in their house in Ramallah, Safiyya had said to him:

"They're going everywhere now. Why don't we go to Haifa?"

He was having dinner at the time. He saw his hand stop involuntarily between the plate and his mouth. He looked at her after a moment and saw her turn away so he wouldn't be able to read anything in her eyes. Then he said to her:

"Go to Haifa? Why?"

Her voice was soft:

"To see our house. Just to see it."

He placed the bite of food back on his plate, got up and stood in front of her. She held her head low against her chest like someone confessing to an unexpected sin. He placed his fingers under her chin and raised her head to look into her eyes, which were moist with tears. Compassionately, he asked her:

"Safiyya, what are you thinking about?"

She nodded her head in agreement without speaking, for she knew that he knew. Perhaps he too was thinking about it all along but was waiting for her to bring it up, so she wouldn't feel—as she always did—as though she had been the one at fault for the catastrophe that had occurred in both of their hearts. He whispered hoarsely:

"Khaldun?"

All at once that name which had remained unspoken for so many years was out in the open. The few times they had spoken of the child they always said "him." They avoided giving any of their other three sons that name, although they called the eldest Khalid and the daughter who followed a year and a half later,

Khalida. Said himself was called Abu Khalid,[8] and old friends who knew what happened all agreed to say that Khaldun had died. How could the past come rushing in now by the back door in such an extraordinary way?

Said remained standing as though asleep some place far away. After a while he came to himself and strode back to his place. Before he sat down he said:

"Delusions, Safiyya, delusions! Don't deceive yourself so tragically. You know how we questioned and investigated. You know the stories of the Red Cross and the peace-keeping forces, and the foreign friends we sent there. No, I don't want to go to Haifa. It's a disgrace. If it's a disgrace for the people of Haifa, for you and me it's a double disgrace. Why torture ourselves?"

Her sobbing grew louder, but she didn't say anything. They passed the night without a word, listening to the sound of soldiers' boots striking the road and to the radio still giving the news.

When he went to bed he knew in his heart that there was no escape. The thought lurking there for twenty years had finally come to light and there was no way to bury it again. Even though he knew that his wife wasn't asleep, that she, too, was thinking about the same thing all night long, he didn't speak to her. In the morning she said to him quietly:

"If you want to go, take me with you. Said, don't try to go alone."

He knew Safiyya well, he knew the way she could sense every thought that went through his mind. Once again she had stopped him in his tracks. During the night he had decided to go alone, and here she had uncovered his decision instinctively and forbidden it.

It remained hanging over them, day and night, for a week. They ate it with their food and slept with it, but they did not speak a word about it. Then, just last night, he said to her:

"Let's go to Haifa tomorrow. At least take a look. Maybe we can pass near our house. I think they're going to issue an order prohibiting it soon. Their calculations were wrong."

He was quiet for a moment. He wasn't sure whether he wanted to change the subject, but he heard himself continue:

"In Jerusalem and Nablus and here people talk every day

about their visits to Jaffa, Acre, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Safad, towns in Galilee and in Muthallath.[9] They all tell the same story. It seems that what they saw with their own eyes didn't measure up to their speculations. Most of them bring back stories of failure. Apparently, the miracle the Jews talked about was nothing but an illusion. There's a strong negative reaction in this country, exactly the opposite of what they wanted when they opened their border to us. That's why, Safiyya, I expect them to rescind the order soon. So I said to myself, why don't we take advantage of the opportunity and go?"

When he looked at Safiyya, she was trembling, and he saw her face become deathly pale as she fled from the room. He himself felt burning tears block his throat. From that point on the name Khaldun had not stopped ringing in his head, exactly as it had twenty years ago, over and over above the surging throng at the port. It had to be the same for Safiyya because they talked about everything throughout the trip, everything except Khaldun. Finally, nearing Bat Gallim, they fell silent. Here they were, gazing silently at the road they both knew so well, its memory stuck fast in their heads like part of their very flesh and bones.

As he used to do twenty years before, he slowed the car down to its lowest gear before reaching the curve that he knew concealed a difficult rocky surface behind it. He turned the car the way he always did and climbed the slope, watching out for the exact spot on the narrowing road. The three cypress trees that hung over the road had new branches. He wanted to stop a moment to read the names carved long ago on their trunks; he could almost remember them one by one. But he didn't stop. He didn't remember exactly how things had happened, but it started to come back to him when he passed a door he knew, where someone from the priest's family used to live. The priest's family owned a large building on South Stanton Street, near Halul Street. It was in that building—the day of the flight—that the Arab fighters barricaded themselves and fought to their last bullet and maybe their last man. He had passed that building when he was pushed toward the port by a force that surpassed his own strength. He remembered exactly that it was there and

only there when the memory fell upon him like a blow from a rock. There, exactly, he had remembered Khaldun, and his heart had pounded that day twenty years ago and it continued pounding harder still today until it was nearly loud enough to be heard.

Suddenly, the house loomed up, the very house he had first lived in, then kept alive in his memory for so long. Here it was again, its front balcony bearing its coat of yellow paint.

Instantly he imagined that Safiyya, young again with her hair in a long braid, was about to lean over the balcony toward him. There was a new clothesline attached to two pegs on the balcony; new bits of washing, red and white, hung on the line. Safiyya began to cry audibly. He turned to the right and directed the car's wheels up over the low curb, then stopped the car in its old spot. Just like he used to do—exactly—twenty years ago.

Said S. hesitated for just a moment as he let the engine die down. But he knew inside himself that if he hesitated for very long, it would end right there. He would start up the engine again and leave. So he made the whole thing appear, to himself and to his wife, perfectly natural, as though the past twenty years had been put between two huge presses and crushed until they became a thin piece of transparent paper. He got out of the car and slammed the door behind him. He hitched up his belt and looked toward the balcony, absently jingling the keys in his palm.

Safiyya came around the car to his side, but she was not as composed as he was. He took her by the arm and crossed the street with her—the sidewalk, the green iron gate, the stairs.

They began to climb, and he didn't give either of them the opportunity to see all the little things that would jolt and throw them off balance—the bell and the copper lock and the bullet holes in the wall and the electricity box and the fourth step broken in its center and the smooth carved balustrade which the palm slid over and the unyielding iron grillwork of the *masatib*[10] and the first floor, where Mahjub es-Saadi lived, where the door was always ajar and the children always playing in front, filling the stairway with their shouts—past all of that and on to the recently painted wooden door, firmly closed.

He put his fingers on the bell and said to Safiyya quietly:

"They changed the bell."

He was silent a moment, then added:

"And the name. Naturally."

He forced a foolish smile onto his face and placed his hand over Safiyya's. Her hand was cold and trembling. From behind the door they heard slow footsteps. "An elderly person, no doubt," he said to himself. There was the muffled sound of a bolt creaking, and the door opened slowly.

"So this is she." He didn't know whether he said it out loud or to himself in the form of a deep sigh. He remained standing in the same place without knowing what he should do. He chided himself for not having prepared an opening sentence in spite of the fact that he had known with certainty that this very moment would arrive. He stirred himself and looked toward Safiyya for help. Umm Khalid[11] thereupon took a step forward and said:

"May we come in?"

The old woman didn't understand. She was short and rather plump and was dressed in a blue dress with white polka dots. As Said began to translate into English, the lines of her face came together, questioning. She stepped aside, allowing Said and Safiyya to enter, then led them into the living room.

Said followed her, Safiyya at his side, with slow, hesitant steps. They began to pick out the things around them with a certain bewilderment. The entrance seemed smaller than he had imagined it and felt a little damp. He saw many things he had once considered—and for that matter still considered—to be intimate and personal, things he believed were sacred and private property which no one had the right to become familiar with, to touch, or even to look at. A photograph of Jerusalem he remembered very clearly still hung where it had when he lived there. On the opposite wall a small Syrian carpet also remained where it had always hung.

He looked around, rediscovering the items, sometimes little by little and sometimes all at once, like someone recovering from a long period of unconsciousness. When they reached the living room he saw two chairs from the set of five he used to

own. The other three chairs were new, and they seemed crude and out of harmony with the rest of the furnishings. In the center of the room was the same inlaid table, although its color had faded a bit. The glass vase on top of the table had been replaced by a wooden one, and in it was a bunch of peacock feathers. He knew there used to be seven of them. He tried to count them from where he was sitting, but he couldn't, so he got up, moved closer to the vase and counted them one by one. There were only five.

When he turned to go back to his seat, he saw that the curtains were different. The ones Safiyya had made twenty years ago from sugar-colored yarn had been taken down and replaced by curtains with long blue threads running through them.

Then his gaze fell on Safiyya and he saw that she seemed confused. She was examining the corners of the room as though counting up the things that were missing. The old woman was sitting in front of them on the arm of one of the chairs, looking at them with a blank smile on her face. Finally, without changing her smile, she said:

"I have been expecting you for a long time."

Her English was hesitant and marked by something like a German accent. She seemed to be pulling the words up out of a bottomless well as she pronounced them.

Said leaned forward and asked her:

"Do you know who we are?"

She nodded several times to emphasize her certainty. She thought for a moment, choosing her words, then said slowly:

"You are the owners of this house. I know that."

"How do you know?"

Said and Safiyya both asked the question simultaneously.

The old woman continued to smile. Then she said:

"From everything. From the photographs, from the way the two of you stood in front of the door. The truth is, ever since the war ended many people have come here, looking at the houses and going into them. Every day I said that surely you would come."

At once she seemed to become confused and began to look around at the things distributed throughout the room as

though she were seeing them for the first time. Involuntarily, Said followed her glance, moving his eyes from place to place as she moved hers. Safiyya did the same. He said to himself, "How strange! Three pairs of eyes looking at one thing . . . but how differently each see it!"

The old woman spoke then, more quietly now and even more slowly.

"I'm sorry. But that's what happened. I never thought things would be the way they are now."

Said smiled bitterly. He didn't know how he could say to her that he hadn't come for that, that he wouldn't get into a political discussion, that he knew she wasn't guilty of anything.

She, not guilty of anything?

No, not exactly. But how could he explain it to her?

Safiyya saved him the trouble for she began to question the woman in a voice that seemed suspiciously innocent. Said translated.

"Where did you come from?"

"From Poland."

"When?"

"1948."

"When exactly?"

"March 1st, 1948."

A heavy silence prevailed. All of them began to look around at things they had no need to look at. Said broke the silence, saying calmly:

"Naturally we didn't come to tell you to get out of here. That would take a war . . ."

Safiyya pressed his hand to keep him from veering away from the conversation, and he understood. He continued, trying to keep his words closer to the subject.

"I mean, your presence here, in this house, our house, Safiyya's and my house, is another matter. We only came to take a look at things, our things. Maybe you can understand that."

She said quickly:

"I understand, but . . ."

Then he lost his composure. "Yes, but! This terrible, deadly, enduring 'but' . . ."

He fell silent beneath the pressure of his wife's gaze. He felt he'd never be able to reach his goal. They were on a collision course here, it couldn't be denied. What was going on now was nothing more than absurd talk.

For a moment he wanted to get up and leave. Nothing mattered to him anymore. Whether Khaldun was alive or dead made no difference. How things reached that point he simply couldn't say. He was filled with helpless, bitter anger and felt as if he were about to explode inside. He didn't know how his gaze happened to fall upon the five peacock feathers stuck in the wooden vase in the middle of the room. He saw their rare, beautiful colors shifting in the puffs of wind coming from the open window. Pointing at the vase, he demanded gruffly:

"There were seven feathers. What happened to the two missing feathers?"

The old woman looked where he was pointing, then looked at him again questioningly. He continued to hold his arm outstretched toward the vase, staring, demanding an answer. His entire universe hung in the balance, poised on the tip of her tongue. She rose from her chair and grasped the vase as though for the first time. Slowly she said:

"I don't know where the two feathers you speak of went. I can't remember. Maybe Dov played with them when he was a child and lost them."

"Dov?"

They said it together, Said and Safiyya. They stood up as if the earth had flung them up. They looked at her tensely, and she continued:

"Of course. Dov. I don't know what his name used to be, nor if it even matters to you, but he looks a lot like you . . ."

3

Now, after two hours of intermittent talk, it was possible to put things back in order, that is, to sort out what had happened in those few days between Wednesday night, April 21, 1948, when Said S. left Haifa on a British boat,

pushed aboard with his wife, to be cast off an hour later on the empty shore of Acre, and Thursday, April 29, 1948, when a member of the Haganah,[12] accompanied by a man who looked like a chicken, opened the door of Said S.'s house in Halisa. With that opening, the way was cleared for Iphrat Koshen and his wife, who had both come from Poland, to enter what from then on became their house, rented from the Bureau of Absentee Property in Haifa.[13]

Iphrat Koshen reached Haifa via Milan early in the month of March under the auspices of the Jewish Agency.[14] He had left Warsaw with a small convoy of people in early November of 1947. He lived in a temporary residence on the outskirts of the Italian port, which at the time was fraught with unaccustomed activity. At the beginning of March he was transferred by ship with some of the other men and women to Haifa.

His papers were in perfect order. A small truck carried him and his few possessions across the clamorous port area, which was filled with merchandise and teeming with British soldiers and Arab workers, and on through the tense streets of Haifa that rumbled with sporadic gunfire. At Hadar he lived in a small room in a building choked with people.

Iphrat Koshen soon realized that most of the rooms in the building were packed with new emigres waiting for eventual transfer to some other place. He didn't know whether the residents themselves came up with the name "Emigres' Lodge" as they sat together eating dinner each night or whether it had been known by that name before and they were merely making use of it.

Perhaps he had looked out at Halisa from his balcony a few times, but he didn't know or couldn't even guess that he would come to live there. In truth, he believed that when things calmed down he'd go to live in a quiet house in the country at the foot of some hill in Galilee. He'd read *Thieves in the Night* by Arthur Koestler[15] while in Milan; a man who came from England to oversee the emigration operation had lent it to him. This man had lived for a while on the very hill in Galilee that Koestler used as the background for his novel. Actually, not much was known about Palestine at that time. For Iphrat,

Palestine was nothing more than a stage set adapted from an old legend and still decorated in the manner of the colorful scenes pictured in Christian religious books designed to be used by children in Europe. Of course, he didn't fully believe that the land was only a desert rediscovered by the Jewish Agency after two thousand years,[16] but that wasn't what mattered most to him then. He'd been placed in a residence where something called "waiting" caused him to be taken up with daily concerns like the others there with him.

Perhaps because he'd heard gunfire ever since leaving the port of Haifa at the end of that first week of March 1948, he didn't think very much about whether something terrible might be happening at the time. In any event, he had never met a single Arab in his entire life. In fact, it was in Haifa that he came upon his first Arab, a year and a half after the occupation. The whole situation was such that he could keep a picture in his mind throughout those oppressive days, a picture that was concealed and isolated from what was really happening. It was a mythical picture, in perfect harmony with what he had imagined in Warsaw or in Milan during the twenty-five years of his life. So the fighting he heard and read about every morning in the *Palestine Post* seemed to be taking place between men and ghosts, nothing more.

Where, exactly, was he on Wednesday, April 21, 1948, at the time when Said S. was lost between Allenby Street and Halul, and Safiyya was rushing from Halisa down to the edge of the business district in the direction of Stanton Street?

It was impossible to remember the events precisely and in detail at this point. However, he remembered that the battle that began Wednesday morning lasted continuously until Thursday evening. Only on Friday morning, April 23, could he tell for sure that it was all over in Haifa; the Haganah controlled the entire area. He really didn't know exactly what had happened. The explosions seemed to come from Hadar, and the details gathered from the radio and from news brought by people coming in from time to time melded together in such a way as to make it all too difficult to understand. But he knew that the decisive attack that had begun on Wednesday morning had

been launched from three centers and that Colonel Moshe Karmatil[17] was directing three battalions in Hadar Ha-Carmel and the business district. One of the battalions was to sweep through Halisa, the bridge and Wadi Rushmiyya, toward the port. At the same time, another battalion was to press forward from the business district in order to block off the people who were fleeing by forcing them along a narrow street that led to the sea.[18] Iphrat didn't know the precise locations of the positions whose names he remembered from sheer repetition, but there was a connection between the words *Irgun*[19] and *Wadi Nisnas* that led him to understand that the Irgun was in charge of the attack from that location.

Iphrat Koshen didn't need anyone to tell him that the English had an interest in delivering Haifa into the hands of the Haganah. It was well within his knowledge that they had played, and continued to play, a joint role. He'd seen it for himself two or three times. He didn't remember how he came by the information about the role of Brigadier Stockwell,[20] but he was sure it was true. The rumor was circulating in every corner of the Emigres' Lodge that Brigadier Stockwell threw his weight to the Haganah. He concealed the date of the British withdrawal and leaked it only to the Haganah, thereby giving them the element of surprise at the most appropriate moment, when the Arabs were figuring that the British Army would relinquish its power at a later date.[21]

Iphrat stayed at the Emigres' Lodge all that Wednesday and Thursday, for they had been instructed not to leave the building. Some began to go out on Friday, but he didn't go out until Saturday morning. He was immediately struck by the fact that he didn't see any cars. It was a true Jewish Sabbath! This brought tears to his eyes for reasons he couldn't explain. When his wife saw this, she too was surprised and said to him with tears in her own eyes:

"I'm crying for another reason. Yes, this is a true Sabbath. But there is no longer a true Sabbath on Friday, nor a true one on Sunday."[22]

That was just the beginning. For the first time since his arrival, his wife had called his attention to something troubling, something which he had neither counted on nor thought

about. The signs of destruction that he began to notice took on another meaning, but he refused to let himself worry or even think about it.

From the standpoint of his wife Miriam, however, the situation was different. It changed that very day as she passed near Bethlehem Church in Hadar. She saw two young men from the Haganah carrying something, which they put in a small truck stopped nearby. In a flash she saw what it was they were carrying. She grabbed her husband's arm and, trembling, cried out:

"Look!"

But her husband didn't see anything when he looked where she was pointing. The two men were wiping their palms on the sides of their khaki shirts. She said to her husband: "That was a dead Arab child! I saw it! And it was covered with blood!"

Her husband guided her across the street, then asked:

"How do you know it was an Arab child?"

"Didn't you see how they threw it onto the truck, like a piece of wood? If it had been a Jewish child they would never have done that."

He wanted to ask her why, but when he saw her face, he remained silent.

Miriam had lost her father at Auschwitz eight years before. When they raided the house where she lived with her husband, he wasn't home, so she took refuge with the upstairs neighbors. The German soldiers didn't find anyone, but on their way back down the stairs they came upon her ten-year-old brother, who most likely had been on his way to tell her that their father had been sent to the camps, leaving him all alone. When he saw the German soldiers, he turned and began running away. She saw it all through the narrow slit made by a short gap between the stairs. She also saw how they shot him down.

By the time Iphrat and Miriam got back to the Emigres' Lodge, Miriam had decided to return to Italy. But she couldn't, either that night or in the next few days, convince her husband. She always lost the arguments quickly and couldn't find the words to express her views or explain the real meaning of her motives.

A week later, however, the situation changed again. Her

husband returned from a trip to the office of the Jewish Agency in Haifa with two bits of good news: they had been given a house right in Haifa, and along with the house, a five-month-old baby!

Thursday evening, April 22, 1948. Tura Zonshtein, the divorced woman who lived with her small son on the third floor, right above Said S., heard a sound coming from the second floor of a baby weakly crying.

At first, she could not believe the immediate thought that came into her mind. But when the whimpering continued, she roused herself and went down to the second floor and knocked on the door.

Finally, she felt compelled to break the door open. There was the child in his crib, completely exhausted. She carried him up to her own house.

Tura figured that things would return to normal soon. It didn't take long, however—only two or three days—before that assessment fell apart. She realized that the situation was completely different from what she had figured it to be. It wasn't possible for her to continue to look after the baby, so she took him to the office of the Jewish Agency in Haifa where she thought something would be done to solve the problem.

It was Iphrat Koshen's luck to come in to that office a few minutes later. When the officials saw from his papers that he didn't have any children, they offered him a house right in Haifa as a special concession if he agreed to adopt the child.

This proposition came as a complete surprise to Iphrat, who had been longing to adopt a child ever since he'd learned for certain that Miriam couldn't have children. The whole thing seemed to him to be a gift from God; he could hardly believe it had come about so suddenly, just like that. Without a doubt, a child would change Miriam completely and put a stop to the strange ideas that had been filling her mind continuously ever since she'd seen the dead Arab child thrown onto the death cart like a lump of worthless wood.

Thus the day was Thursday, the 29th[23] of April, 1948, the day when Iphrat Koshen and his wife Miriam, accompanied by

the chicken-faced man from the Jewish Agency carrying a five-month-old baby, entered the house of Said S. in Halisa.

As for Said and Safiyya, on that same day they were weeping together after Said had returned from the last of his endless attempts to get back into Haifa. Racked and overcome, he slept from sheer exhaustion, as though unconscious. This was in a sixth-grade classroom in a secondary school, facing one of the walls surrounding the notorious Acre prison on the western seashore.[24]

Said didn't touch Miriam's coffee. Safiyya took just one sip, and with it a piece of one of the tinned biscuits Miriam had smilingly put before them.

Said continued to look around. His confusion had lessened somewhat as he listened to Miriam's story unfold little by little during what seemed a very long time. He and Safiyya remained nailed to their chairs, waiting for something unknown to take place, something they couldn't imagine.

Miriam came and went, and each time she disappeared behind the door, they listened to her slow steps dragging along the floor tiles. If she closed her eyes, Safiyya could imagine exactly Miriam going down the hall leading to the kitchen. On the right was the bedroom. Once, when they heard a door slam, Safiyya looked at Said and said bitterly:

"As if she's in her own house! She acts as if it's her house!"

They smiled in silence. Said pressed his palms together between his knees, unable to decide what to do. Finally, Miriam returned and they asked her:

"When will he get here?"

"It's time for him to return now, but he's late. He never was on time getting home. He's just like his father. He was . . ."

She broke off. Biting her lip, she looked at Said, who was trembling as if he'd been hit by an electric shock. "Like his father!" Then suddenly he asked himself, "What is fatherhood?" It was like throwing a window wide open to an unexpected cyclone. He put his head between his hands to try to stop the wild spinning of the question that had been suppressed somewhere in his mind for twenty years, the question he'd never dared to face. Safiyya began to stroke his shoulder, for in some

uncanny way she understood what he felt, the sudden impact of words colliding to bring about the inevitable. She said:

"Look who's talking! She said, 'Like his father!' As if Khaldun had a father other than you!"

But then Miriam stepped forward and stood preparing herself to say something difficult. Slowly she began to extract the words, and it seemed as though unseen hands were pulling them from the depths of a well full of dust.

"Listen, Mr. Said. I want to tell you something important. I wanted you to wait for Dov—or Khaldun, if you like—so you could talk to each other and the matter could end as it naturally should end. Do you think this hasn't been as much of a problem for me as it's been for you? For the past twenty years I've been confused, but now the time has come for us to finish the matter. I know who his father is. And I also know that he is our son. But let's call on him to decide. Let's call on him to choose. He's of age and we must recognize that he's the only one who has the right to choose. Do you agree?"

Said got up and walked around the room. He stopped in front of the inlaid table and once more began to count the feathers in the wooden vase perched there. He said nothing. He kept silent as though he had not heard a word. Miriam watched him expectantly. Finally, he turned to Safiyya and told her what Miriam had said. Safiyya got up and stood by his side and said, her voice trembling:

"That's a fair choice. I'm certain Khaldun will choose his real parents. It's impossible to deny the call of flesh and blood."

Said burst out laughing, his laughter filled with a profound bitterness that bespoke defeat.

"What Khaldun, Safiyya? What Khaldun? What flesh and blood are you talking about? You say this is a fair choice? They've taught him how to be for twenty years, day by day, hour by hour, with his food, his drink, his sleep. And you say, a fair choice! Truly Khaldun, or Dov, or the devil if you like, doesn't know us! Do you want to know what I think? Let's get out of here and return to the past. The matter is finished. They stole him."

He looked over at Safiyya, who had collapsed into her chair.

All at once, for the first time, she faced the truth. Said's words seemed to her to be true, but she was still trying to hang on to the invisible thread of hope she had constructed in her imagination for twenty years as a sort of bribe. Her husband said to her:

"Maybe he never knew at all that he was born of Arab parents. Or maybe he learned it a month ago, a week ago, a year ago. What do you think? He was deceived, and perhaps he was even more enthusiastic in the deception than they were. The crime began twenty years ago and there's no doubt who paid the price. It began the day we left him here."

"But we didn't leave him. You know that."

"Yes, sure. We shouldn't have left anything. Not Khaldun, not the house, not Haifa! Didn't the same frightening feeling come over you that came over me while I was driving through the streets of Haifa? I felt as though I knew Haifa, yet the city refused to acknowledge me. I had the same feeling in this house, here, in our house. Can you imagine that? That our house would refuse to acknowledge us? Don't you feel it? I believe the same thing will happen with Khaldun. You'll see!"

Safiyya began to sob miserably. Miriam left the room, which now seemed filled with a palpable tension. Said felt as if all the walls he'd made himself live inside of for twenty years had shattered, letting him see things clearly. He waited until Safiyya's sobbing subsided, then turned to her and asked:

"Do you know what happened to Faris al-Lubda?"

"Ibn al-Lubda?[25] Our neighbor?"

"Of course. Our neighbor in Ramallah who went to Kuwait. Do you know what happened to him when he visited his house in Jaffa just a week ago?"

"He went to Jaffa?"

"Of course. A week ago I think. He hired a car from Jerusalem. He went straight to the Ajami quarter. Twenty years ago he lived in a two-story house behind the Orthodox school in Ajami. Remember the school? It's behind the Freres school,[26] heading left, toward Jabaliyya, after about two hundred meters the Orthodox school is on the right. It's got a large playground. There's an alley just beyond the playground. Faris al-Lubda

lived in the middle of that alley with his family. His anger was boiling that day. He told the driver to stop in front of the house. He took the stairs two at a time and knocked on the door of his house."

4

It was afternoon. Except for the Manshiyya quarter,[27] Jaffa was still the same as when Faris al-Lubda knew it twenty years earlier. The few seconds that elapsed between the time he knocked on the door and the time he heard the approaching footsteps of the man who would open it lengthened into an eternity of anger and helpless, paralyzed sorrow. Finally, the door opened. The man was tall and brown-skinned and wore a white shirt with the buttons open. He stretched out his hand to greet the newcomer. Faris ignored the outstretched hand and spoke with controlled anger.

"I came to have a look at my house. This place where you are living is my house. Your presence here is a sorry comedy that will end one day by the power of the sword. If you wish, you can shoot me right here on the spot, but this is still my house. I've waited twenty years to return. And if . . ."

The man standing on the threshold continued to hold out his hand. He laughed heartily, coming closer to Faris until he was directly in front of him. Then he offered his two open arms and embraced him.

"You don't need to vent your anger on me. I am also an Arab, from Jaffa, like you. I know you. You're Ibn al-Lubda. Come in and have some coffee!"

Baffled, Faris entered. He could hardly believe it. It was the same house, the same furniture and arrangement, the same color on the walls, and all the things he remembered so well. Still smiling broadly, the man led him toward the living room. When he opened the living room door and invited him to enter, Faris stopped, nailed to the floor. His eyes welled up.

The living room was exactly as if he'd left it that morning. It was filled with the same smell as before, the smell of the sea, which always used to stir up a maelstrom in his head of unknown worlds ready to invade and challenge. But that wasn't

what rooted him to his spot. On the glossy white wall facing him a picture of his brother Badr was still hanging, the only picture in the entire room. The wide black ribbon that stretched across the corner of the picture was still there too.

An air of mourning suddenly flooded the room, and tears began to roll down Faris's cheeks as he stood there. Those days were long ago, but now they burst forth as though the portals that had held them back were thrown wide open.

His brother Badr was the first one in Ajami to carry arms that first week of December 1947. From that point on, the house was transformed into a meeting place for the young men who used to fill the playground of the Orthodox school every afternoon. Badr joined the fighting as though he'd been waiting for that day since childhood. Then, on April 6, 1948, Badr was carried home on his companions' shoulders. His pistol was still at his waist, but his rifle, like his body, had been smashed by the grenade that struck him on the road to Tall al-Rish.[28] Ajami escorted his body in a funeral procession befitting a martyr. One of his companions took an enlarged picture of Badr to Iskandar Iwad Street where a calligrapher named Qutub wrote out a small placard saying that Badr al-Lubda was martyred for the sake of his country's independence. One child carried the placard at the head of the funeral procession, while two other children carried Badr's picture. In the evening the picture was returned to the house and a black mourning ribbon was tied to the right-hand corner.

He still remembered how his mother took down all the other pictures hanging on the living room wall and hung Badr's picture on the wall facing the door. From then on the sad smell of mourning permeated the room, and people kept coming to sit there, look at the picture, and offer their sympathy.

From where he stood, Faris could still see the nail heads, which had held other pictures twenty years before, protruding from the naked walls. They looked like men standing and waiting in front of that large picture of his martyred brother, Badr al-Lubda, hanging by itself, draped in black, in the heart of the room.

The man said to Faris:

"Come in, sit down. We need to talk a little. We've been waiting for you[29] a long time, but we hoped to see you under different circumstances."

Faris entered as if he were walking across some incredible dream. He sat in a chair facing his brother's picture. It was the first time he'd seen it in twenty years. When they left Jaffa (a boat carried them from Shatt al-Shabab[30] toward Gaza, but his father returned and went to Jordan), they didn't take anything with them, not even the picture of Badr that remained there.

Faris couldn't utter a sound. Then two children came into the room, ran about between the chairs, and left, shouting as they had come. The man said:

"They are Saad and Badr, my sons."

"Badr?"

"Of course, we gave him the name of your martyred brother."

"And the picture?"

The man stopped, his face changed. Then he said:

"I'm from Jaffa, a resident of Manshiyya. In the 1948 War a mortar shell destroyed my house. I don't want to go into how Jaffa fell and how the ones who came to help us withdrew at the critical moment.[31] That's all over now. The important thing is, when I returned with the fighters to the abandoned city they arrested us, and I was in a prison camp for a long time. When they let me go I refused to leave Jaffa. I happened upon this house and rented it from the government."

"And the picture?"

"When I came to the house, the picture was the first thing I saw. Maybe I rented the house because of it. It's complicated and I can't really explain it to you. When they occupied Jaffa it was a deserted city. After I got out of jail, I felt as if I were under siege. I didn't see a single Arab here. I was a tiny island, alone and isolated in a sea of raging hostility. You didn't experience that agony, but I lived it.

"When I saw the picture, I found consolation in it, a companion that spoke to me, to remind me of things I could be proud of, things I considered to be the best in our lives. So I decided to rent the house. At that time, like now, it seemed to

me that for a man to have a companion who bears arms and dies for his country is something precious that can't be tossed aside. Maybe it was a kind of loyalty to those who fought. I felt that getting rid of it would be an unforgivable betrayal. It helped me not just to resist but also to remain. That's why the picture stayed here. It remained a part of our lives. Me, my wife Lamia, my son Badr, my son Saad, your brother Badr—we're all one family. We've lived together for twenty years. This was something very important to us."

Faris sat there until midnight looking at his brother Badr, full of youth and vigor beneath that black sash, smiling in the picture just as he had for twenty years. When Faris got up to leave, he asked if he could take the picture. The man said:

"Of course. He's your brother, above and beyond anything else."

He got up and took the picture down from the wall. Behind it remained a pale, meaningless rectangle, a disturbing void.

Faris carried the picture out to the car and set off again for Ramallah. All the way home he kept looking at it, lying on the seat beside him. Badr looked out from the picture, smiling that smile of awakening youth. Faris remained like this until they crossed Jerusalem and were on the road for Ramallah. Then suddenly the feeling came over him that he had no right to keep the picture, although he couldn't explain why. He ordered the driver to return to Jaffa and got there in the morning.

He climbed the stairs again, slowly, and knocked at the door. As he took the picture from Faris, the man said:

"I felt a terrible emptiness when I looked at the rectangle left behind on the wall. My wife cried and my children got very upset. I regretted letting you take the picture. In the end, this man is one of us. We lived with him and he lived with us and became part of us. During the night I said to my wife that if you[32] wanted to reclaim him, you'd have to reclaim the house, Jaffa, us . . . The picture doesn't solve your problem, but with respect to us, it's your bridge to us and our bridge to you."

Faris returned to Ramallah alone. Said S. said to his wife:

"Faris al-Lubda, if you only knew . . ."

He whispered in a barely audible voice:

"Now he's carrying arms."

5

On the street a motor rumbled. Miriam came into the room, her face turning pale. It was nearly midnight. The old woman went over to the window and drew back the curtain gently, then announced in a trembling voice:

"Here's Dov. He's come!"

The footsteps on the stairs sounded youthful but tired. Said S. followed them one after another as they climbed the stairs. He listened with nerves taut from the moment he heard the iron gate slam and the bolt lock.

The minutes lengthened, their silence fairly clamoring with a crazy, unbearable ringing. Then came the sound of a key fumbling at the door. Only then did Said look toward Miriam and realize for the first time that she was sitting there trembling, her face pale. He didn't have enough courage to look at Safiyya, so he fastened his eyes on the door, feeling the sweat drip from every pore of his body.

The footsteps in the hallway were muffled and seemed confused. Then came a half-raised voice, hesitant:

"Mama?"

Miriam shuddered slightly and rubbed her hands together. Said listened to Safiyya quietly choking back tears. The footsteps hesitated a little, as if waiting for something. Again the same voice spoke, and when it fell silent, Miriam translated in a trembling whisper:

"He's asking why I'm in the living room at this late hour."

The footsteps continued heading toward the room. The door was ajar, and Miriam said in English:

"Come here, Dov. There are some guests who wish to see you."

The door opened slowly. At first it was hard to believe, since the light by the door was dim, but then the tall man stepped forward: he was wearing a military uniform and carrying his military cap in his hand.

Said leaped to his feet as though an electric current had flung him out of his chair. He looked at Miriam and said tensely:

"Is this the surprise? Is this the surprise you wanted us to wait for?"

Safiyya turned away toward the window and hid her face in her hands, sobbing openly.

The young man remained by the door, shifting his gaze among the three of them, confused. Miriam stood up and said to him slowly, with artificial calmness:

"I would like to present to you your parents—your original parents."

Slowly he took a step forward. His face changed color and it seemed as if he had lost his self-confidence all at once. He looked down at his uniform, then back at Said, who was still standing in front of him, staring at him. Finally he said, in a subdued voice:

"I don't know any mother but you. As for my father, he was killed in the Sinai eleven years ago.[33] I know no others than the two of you."

Said took two steps back, sat down, and placed Safiyya's hand between his own. He was inwardly amazed at how quickly he was able to regain his composure. If anyone had told him five minutes earlier that he'd be sitting there so calmly now, he would not have believed it. But everything was different now.

Slowly the minutes passed, while everything remained motionless. Then the young man began to pace slowly: three steps toward the middle of the room, three steps toward the door, then back to the middle of the room. He set his cap on the table, and somehow it seemed inappropriate, almost laughable, next to the wooden vase full of peacock feathers. The strange sensation came over Said that he was watching a play prepared ahead of time in detail. It reminded him of cheap melodramas in trivial movies with artificial plots.

The young man approached Miriam and said to her in a voice meant to be decisive, final, and to be heeded implicitly:

"What did the two of them come for? Don't tell me they want to take me back?"

In a similar manner, Miriam replied:

"Ask them."

He turned stiffly, as if following an order, and asked Said:

"What do you want, sir?"

Said held his composure, which seemed to him to be nothing more than a thin shell barely covering a smoldering flame. His voice muffled, he said:

"Nothing. Nothing, just . . . curiosity, you know."

A sudden silence fell, and through it rose the sounds of Safiyya's sobs, rather like the creaking chair of an uninvolved observer. The young man shifted his gaze again from Said to Miriam, then to his cap lying against the wooden vase. He retreated as if something had forced him back toward the chair beside Miriam. He sat down, saying:

"No. It's impossible. It's incredible."

Said asked quietly:

"You're in the army? Who are you fighting? Why?"

The young man jumped to his feet.

"You have no right to ask those questions. You're on the other side."

"I? I'm on the other side?"

Said laughed heartily. And with that explosive laughter he felt as if he were pushing out all the pain and tension and fear and anguish in his chest. He wanted to keep on laughing and laughing until the entire world was turned upside down or until he fell asleep or died or raced out to his car. But the young man cut him off sharply.

"I see no reason to laugh."

"I do."

He laughed a little longer then stopped and became silent as suddenly as he had burst out laughing. He leaned back in his chair, feeling his calmness return, fishing through his pockets for a cigarette.

The silence lengthened. Then Safiyya, who had composed herself, asked in a subdued voice:

"Don't you feel that we are your parents?"

No one knew to whom the question was addressed. Miriam certainly didn't understand it, nor did the tall young man. As for Said, he didn't answer. He finished his cigarette then went over to the table to put it out. He felt a compulsion in the

process to rip the cap from its place, so he did, smiling scornfully, then went back and sat down.

At that, the young man, his voice completely changed, said:

"We need to talk like civilized people."

Again, Said laughed.

"You don't want to negotiate, isn't that right? You said you and I are on opposite sides. What happened? Do you want to negotiate, or what?"

Agitated, Safiyya asked:

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

The youth stood up again. He began to speak as though he had prepared the sentences long ago.

"I didn't know that Miriam and Iphrat weren't my parents until about three or four years ago. From the time I was small I was a Jew . . . I went to Jewish school, I studied Hebrew, I go to Temple, I eat kosher food . . . When they told me I wasn't their own child, it didn't change anything. Even when they told me—later on—that my original parents were Arabs, it didn't change anything. No, nothing changed, that's certain. After all, in the final analysis, man is a cause."[34]

"Who said that?"

"Said what?"

"Who said that man is a cause?"

"I don't know. I don't remember. Why do you ask?"

"Curiosity. Actually, just because that's exactly what was going through my mind at this moment."

"That man is a cause?"

"Exactly."

"Then why did you come looking for me?"

"I don't know. Maybe because I didn't know it, or to be more certain about it. I don't know. Anyway, go on."

The young man began pacing again with his hands clasped behind his back: three steps toward the door, three steps toward the table. He seemed to be trying to recall a long lesson learned by heart. Cut off in the middle, he didn't know how to finish, so he reviewed the first part silently in his head in order to be able to continue. Abruptly, he said:

"After I learned that you were Arabs, I kept asking myself:

How could a father and mother leave their five-month-old son behind and run off? How could a mother and father not his own raise him and educate him for twenty years? Twenty years? Do you wish to say anything, sir?"

"No," Said replied briefly and decisively, motioning with his hand for him to continue.

"I'm in the Reserves now. I haven't been in direct combat yet so I can't describe my feelings . . . but perhaps in the future I'll be able to confirm to you what I'm about to say now: I belong here, and this woman is my mother. I don't know the two of you, and I don't feel anything special toward you."

"There's no need for you to describe your feelings to me later on. Maybe your first battle will be with a *fida'i*[35] named Khalid. Khalid is my son. I beg you to notice that I did not say he's your brother. As you said, man is a cause. Last week Khalid joined the *fidayeen*. Do you know why we named him Khalid and not Khaldun? Because we always thought we'd find you, even if it took twenty years. But it didn't happen. We didn't find you, and I don't believe we will find you."

Said rose heavily. Only now did he feel tired, that he had lived his life in vain. These feelings gave way to an unexpected sorrow, and he felt himself on the verge of tears. He knew it was a lie, that Khalid hadn't joined the *fidayeen*. In fact, he himself was the one who had forbidden it. He'd even gone so far as to threaten to disown Khalid if he defied him and joined the resistance. The few days that had passed since then seemed to him a nightmare that ended in terror. Was it really he who, just a few days ago, threatened to disown his son Khalid? What a strange world! And now, he could find no way to defend himself in the face of this tall young man's disavowal other than boasting of his fatherhood of Khalid—the Khalid whom he prevented from joining the *fidayeen* by means of that worthless whip he used to call fatherhood! Who knows? Perhaps Khalid had taken advantage of his being here in Haifa to flee. If only he had! What a failure his presence here would turn out to be if he returned and found Khalid waiting at home.

He moved a few steps forward and once again began to count the peacock feathers in the wooden vase. For the first

time since the young man came into the room, Said looked at Miriam, and said to her slowly:

"He asks how a father and mother could leave their infant child and run off. Madame, you did not tell him the truth. And when you did tell him, it was too late. Are we the ones who left him? Are we the ones who killed that child near Bethlehem Church in Hadar? The child whose body, so you said, was the first thing that shocked you in this world that wipes out justice with baseness every day? Maybe that child was Khaldun! Maybe the small thing that died that wretched day was Khaldun. Yes, it was Khaldun. You lied to us. It was Khaldun. He died. This young man is none other than an orphan child you found in Poland or England."

The young man had withdrawn into himself in the chair, defeated. Said thought: "We've lost him, but surely he's lost himself after all this. He'll never be the same as he was an hour ago." This gave him some deep, inexplicable satisfaction and propelled him toward the chair where the young man sat. He stood in front of him and said:

"Man, in the final analysis, is a cause. That's what you said. And it's true. But what cause? That's the question! Think carefully. Khalid is also a cause, not because he's my son. In fact . . . but put the details, in any case, aside. When we talk about man, it has nothing to do with flesh and blood and identity cards and passports. Can you understand that? Good. Let's imagine that you received us—as we've dreamed for twenty years—with embraces and kisses and tears. Would that have changed anything? Even if you had accepted us, would we accept you? Let your name be Khaldun or Dov or Ishmael or anything else . . . what changes? In spite of it all, I don't feel any scorn toward you. The guilt isn't yours alone. Maybe the guilt will become your fate from this moment on. But beyond that, what? Isn't a human being made up of what's injected into him hour after hour, day after day, year after year? If I regret anything, it's that I believed the opposite for twenty years!"

He resumed his pacing, trying to appear as calm as possible, then returned to his seat. In the few steps it took to pass by the inlaid table where the peacock feathers swayed in the wooden

vase, everything seemed completely changed from when he had first entered the room a few hours before. Then, he asked himself: What is a homeland? He smiled bitterly and allowed himself to drop, as one lets an object drop, into his chair. Safiyya was looking at him with alarm. Her eyes grew wider, questioning, and it occurred to Said that he might draw her into the matter.

"What is a homeland?"

She leaned forward, surprised, as though she didn't believe what she heard. She asked with a delicacy that contained uncertainty:

"What did you say?"

"I said, what is a homeland? I was asking myself that question a moment ago. Naturally. What is a homeland? Is it these two chairs that remained in this room for twenty years? The table? Peacock feathers? The picture of Jerusalem on the wall? The copper lock? The oak tree? The balcony? What is a homeland? Khaldun? Our illusions about him? Fathers? Their sons? What is a homeland? With respect to Faris al-Lubda, what is a homeland? Is it the picture of his brother hanging on the wall? I'm only asking."

Once again, Safiyya began to weep. She dried her tears with a small white handkerchief. Looking at her, Said thought: "How this woman has aged. She squandered her youth waiting for this moment, not knowing what a terrible moment it would be."

He looked at Dov again and it seemed to him utterly impossible that he could have been born of this woman. He tried to make out some similarity between Dov and Khalid, but he couldn't find any resemblance between them. Instead, he saw a difference between the two that verged on making them total opposites. It amazed him that he'd lost any affection toward Dov. He imagined that all his memories of Khaldun were a handful of snow that the blazing sun had suddenly shone upon and melted.

He was still looking at him when Dov got up and stood stiffly in front of Said as if at the head of some hidden army battalion. He was making an effort to be calm.

"Perhaps none of that would have happened if you'd behaved the way a civilized and careful man should behave."

"What?"

"You[36] should not have left Haifa. If that wasn't possible, then no matter what it took, you should not have left an infant in its crib. And if that was also impossible, then you should never have stopped trying to return. You say that too was impossible? Twenty years have passed, sir! Twenty years! What did you do during that time to reclaim your son? If I were you I would've borne arms for that. Is there any stronger motive? You're all weak! Weak! You're bound by heavy chains of backwardness and paralysis! Don't tell me you spent twenty years crying! Tears won't bring back the missing or the lost. Tears won't work miracles! All the tears in the world won't carry a small boat holding two parents searching for their lost child. So you spent twenty years crying. That's what you tell me now? Is this your dull, worn-out weapon?"

Said drew back, shocked and stricken, overcome by vertigo. Could all this be true? Or was it just a long, drawn-out dream, an oppressive nightmare covering him like a horrible octopus? He looked at Safiyya, whose shock had taken the form of helpless collapse. He felt a deep sadness for her sake. Just to avoid appearing foolish he went over to her and said shakily:

"I don't want to argue with him."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing. Well, he said we're cowards."

Safiyya asked innocently:

"And because we're cowards, he can become like this?"

With that Said turned to the youth, who was still standing rigidly. The peacock feathers behind him seemed to form the tail of a large khaki-colored bird, the sight of which animated Said unexpectedly.

"My wife asks if the fact that we're cowards gives you the right to be this way. As you can see, she innocently recognizes that we were cowards. From that standpoint you are correct. But that doesn't justify anything for you. Two wrongs do not make a right. If that were the case, then what happened to Iphrat and Miriam in Auschwitz was right. When are you[37] going to stop considering that the weakness and the mistakes of others are endorsed over to the account of your own prerogatives? These old catchwords are worn out, these mathematical

equations are full of cheating. First you say that our mistakes justify your mistakes, then you say that one wrong doesn't absolve another. You use the first logic to justify your presence here, and the second to avoid the punishment your presence here deserves. It seems to me you greatly enjoy this strange game. Here again, you're trying to fashion a race horse out of our weakness and mount its back. No, I'm not decreeing that you're an Arab. Now I know, better than anyone, that man is a cause, not flesh and blood passed down from generation to generation like a merchant and his client exchanging a can of chopped meat. I'm decreeing that in the final analysis you're a human being, Jewish or whatever you want. You must come to understand things as they should be understood. I know that one day you'll realize these things, and that you'll realize that the greatest crime any human being can commit, whoever he may be, is to believe even for one moment that the weakness and mistakes of others give him the right to exist at their expense and justify his own mistakes and crimes."

He was quiet for a moment, then looked directly into Dov's eyes.

"And you, do you believe we'll continue making mistakes? If we should stop making mistakes one day, what would be left for you then?"

He had a feeling that they should get up and leave, for everything had come to an end, and there was nothing more to say. At that moment he felt a deep longing for Khalid and wished he could fly to him and embrace him and kiss him and cry on his shoulder, reversing the roles of father and son in some unique, inexplicable way. "This is the homeland." He said it to himself, smiling, then turned to his wife:

"Do you know what the homeland is, Safiyya? The homeland is where none of this can happen."

"What happened to you, Said?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. I was just asking. I'm looking for the true Palestine, the Palestine that's more than memories, more than peacock feathers, more than a son, more than scars written by bullets on the stairs. I was just saying to myself: What's Palestine with respect to Khalid? He doesn't know the vase or the picture or the stairs or Halisa or Khaldun. And yet

for him, Palestine is something worthy of a man bearing arms for, dying for. For us, for you and me, it's only a search for something buried beneath the dust of memories. And look what we found beneath that dust. Yet more dust. We were mistaken when we thought the homeland was only the past. For Khalid, the homeland is the future. That's how we differed and that's why Khalid wants to carry arms. Tens of thousands like Khalid won't be stopped by the tears of men searching in the depths of their defeat for scraps of armor and broken flowers. Men like Khalid are looking toward the future, so they can put right our mistakes and the mistakes of the whole world. Dov is our shame, but Khalid is our enduring honor. Didn't I tell you from the beginning that we shouldn't come—because that was something requiring a war? Let's go!"

Khalid knew it before we did . . . Oh Safiyya! . . . Oh![38]

He stood up and Safiyya stood beside him, twisting her handkerchief in confusion. Dov remained seated, withdrawn. His cap was resting against the vase again, and it seemed, for some reason, ridiculous. Miriam said slowly:

"You can't leave like this. We haven't talked about it enough."

Said replied:

"There's absolutely nothing more to say. For you, perhaps the whole thing was just bad luck. But history isn't like that. When we came here we were resisting it, like we were, I admit, when we left Haifa. However, all of that is only temporary. Do you know something, madame? It seems to me every Palestinian is going to pay a price. I know many who have paid with their sons. I know now that I, too, paid with a son, in a strange way, but I paid him as a price . . . That was my first installment, and it's something that will be hard to explain."

He turned. Dov was still withdrawn in his chair, holding his head between his hands. When Said reached the door, he said:

"You two may remain in our house temporarily. It will take a war to settle that."

He started down the stairs, looking at everything carefully. It all seemed less important than it had a few hours earlier,

incapable of arousing any deep feeling in him. He heard the sound of Safiyya's footsteps behind him, more confident than before. The road outside was nearly empty. He headed for the car and let it coast noiselessly to the foot of the slope. Only at the bend did he start the engine and head for King Faisal Street.

They were silent all the way. They didn't utter a word until they reached the edge of Ramallah. Only then did he look at his wife and say:

"I pray that Khalid will have gone—while we were away!"

—translated by Karen E. Riley

Notes to *Returning to Haifa*

Returning to Haifa was published in 1969 under the title, *'A'id ila Hayfa.* Since its brevity suggests a novella, it is referred to as such here. However, it is generally referred to in Arabic as a novel to distinguish it from the great number of Kanafani's works that were short stories.

I have translated the original Arabic as literally as possible for reasons more fully set forth in the Introduction. But certain devices such as the use of contractions, particularly in the dialogue, were chosen not so much because Kanafani uses the colloquial as his writing tool (as Tawfiq al-Hakim does, for example, in his plays), but because he expresses the feelings and experiences of his characters with an intimacy and immediacy that warrants the use of such language in English. In the interest of appealing to the nonscholarly reader, I have also used common spellings for Arabic words and proper names if they are well known in English, and simple transliterations for those not commonly known. Idioms or specific vocabulary with no English equivalents are noted and explained where necessary. Annotations to the text have also been included in order to "level the playing field" for the general reader, clarifying references to places, people, or events that would be instantly familiar to the Palestinian reader (or most any Arabic-speaking reader in 1969) from personal experience or oral tradition.

—K. E. R.

1. In the June 1967 war, in addition to taking East Jerusalem, Israeli forces captured the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights. The offensive against Syria began on

June 9, after Egypt and Jordan were defeated, so the entire Israeli force was concentrated directly on Syria. In twenty-seven hours Israel swept through the Golan Heights and was on the verge of reaching Damascus when a ceasefire was signed on June 11. The Mandelbaum Gate was the main passage between West Jerusalem, belonging to Israel, and East Jerusalem, controlled by Jordan between 1948–1967. The gate was torn down by Israel, "reuniting" Jerusalem after the June 1967 war.

2. In the aftermath of the 1948 war, Jordan annexed the West Bank, and Palestinians living there were officially subject to Jordanian rule, hence the Jordanian plates on Said S.'s car shortly after the 1967 war. Most Arabic geographical names were replaced with Hebrew in the part of Palestine that became Israel.

3. Literally, *Why? For the blackness of your eyes and my eyes?*

4. The city of Haifa is built on three levels determined by elevations that stretch back from the Mediterranean coast toward and up Mount Carmel. In 1948, the first and second levels had developed sufficiently to be contiguous, but the highest level was sparsely populated and separated from the lower two levels by a wide band of undeveloped property. *Halisa* was one of the Arab residential quarters of Haifa that were located on the first level adjoining the port; the Old City and the business district were also located on the first level. *Hadar Ha-Carmel* was the main Jewish residential neighborhood and administrative center of Haifa, located on the second level; it remains so today as well as being Haifa's commercial center. The highest level, *Har Ha-Carmel*, is residential and also contains recreational areas. *Wadi* means the course of a dry river or stream bed through which water may flow in wet seasons or after flash floods. *Wadi Nisnas* is the name of a residential quarter as well as of a wadi on the northwest edge of the business district.

5. *Wadi Rushmiyya:* A wadi on the southeast edge of the business district. A strategically important bridge spanned Wadi Rushmiyya over which all eastbound traffic out of Haifa flowed. A concrete structure that served as the control tower for bridge traffic was the site of a fierce confrontation between Arab and Jewish soldiers at the beginning of the battle for Haifa. After the founding of Israel, the bridge and wadi were renamed *Gibborim* ("Heroes") and a plaque was placed on the control tower commemorating the Jewish soldiers who died in battle there. *Burj*, meaning "tower," was the name of a street in Haifa and also a Turkish fortification dating from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

6. Compare this scene with the following eyewitness accounts:

> A rumor swept through town that the British army stood ready to transfer out of Haifa anyone who was able to reach the port. 'A panic-stricken stampede began heading towards the gates of the port. Men trampled on their brothers, women on their children. The boats in the harbor quickly filled with human cargo.' *The Palestine War 1947–1948: The Official Israeli Version* [Hebrew, tr. to Arabic by Ahmad Khalifa] (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 1984), 469.
>
> The majority of the population panicked and thousands surged out of the town into the port whence they were evacuated to Acre. While they were thus in full flight they were engaged by the advanced Jewish posts which inflicted a number of casualties on them. R. D. Wilson, "The Battle for Haifa," in Rashid Khalidi, ed., *From Haven to Conquest* (Washington: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1987), 773.
>
> They could only flee in one direction: as the Zionist *Jerusalem Post* openly reported the next day about the exodus, it was an offensive 'forcing them to flee by the only open escape route—the sea.' The flight to the harbor down the narrow lanes, with children and older people being trampled to death and drowning in overloaded boats, was accompanied by clearly directed Zionist firing on them. *The Jerusalem Post*, April 23, 1948; and R. D. Wilson, *Cordon and Search: With the 6th Airborne Division in Palestine* (Aldershot, England: Gale & Polden, 1949), 193; both cited in Erskine B. Childers, "The Wordless Wish: From Citizens to Refugees," in Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, ed., *The Transformation of Palestine* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 189–190.

7. *Bat Gallim:* Hebrew, meaning "daughter of the waves." It is written incorrectly in the Arabic as *Bayt* (Arabic for "house") *Gallim.* Bat Gallim is the northwestern tip of Haifa; it protrudes into the sea, forming a beach. The road into Haifa from the south follows the Mediterranean coast straight north, circles the Bat Gallim promonto-

ry, then heads east and south into Haifa proper, where the city borders Haifa Bay. Hence, Bat Gallim is the first part of Haifa reached by a traveler approaching from the south.

8. The names are all derived from the same three-letter Arabic root, *kh-l-d,* meaning "to remain" or "last forever." *Khaldun* is a true proper name derived from the root, meaning "those who are immortal." *Khalid* (fem. *Khalida*) is an adjective of general usage as well as a proper name and means "eternal," "enduring." The use of the same root for the children born later signifies a desire to keep alive the memory of the firstborn without directly admitting his possible death by assigning his exact name to another child. *Abu* means "father of." Traditionally, an Arab father is known as "father of" his firstborn son. Said S. thus would have been known as Abu Khaldun had he wished to acknowledge the existence of the child left behind.

9. *Galilee* and *Muthallath:* Galilee comprises the northern area between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River/Sea of Galilee; Muthallath extends into the Kingdom of Jordan. *Safad* is a town in Galilee.

10. *Masatib,* plural of *mastaba*: A *mastaba* is a stone bench built into the side of a house, or a bench-height stone wall surrounding a house, enclosing a patio area outside of the house. The reference to iron grillwork of the *masatib* seems incongruous; however, a photograph of the Kanafani family's own house in Acre shows a stone wall surrounding the house with an iron grillwork fence extending upward out of the stone. The stone and iron appear to form a flush surface from the outside, but the photograph is accompanied by a reference to someone "sitting" on the *mastaba.* This would lead one to believe that the stone portion extended out beyond the iron grillwork on the inside, indeed forming a "bench" facing the inside of the enclosed area. Perhaps this is what is referred to here in the novel.

11. *Umm* means "mother of" (see Note 8). Kanafani's use of *Umm Khalid* to identify Safiyya here emphasizes Safiyya's changed relationship to the house since she last saw it.

12. *Haganah* (Hebrew, meaning "defense"): Military organization tracing its roots back to early Jewish settlers living in Palestine under Ottoman rule, who banded together for protection calling themselves *Shomrim* ("watchmen"), and later *Hashomer* ("the watchman"). With the establishment of the British Mandate in 1922, the Hashomer was disbanded and reorganized on a national level by Jewish labor groups and renamed *Haganah.* The Haganah eventually came under the direction of the Jewish Agency and upon passage of the United

Nations partition plan was merged with other military groups and named *Tzva Haganah Leyisrael* ("Israeli Defense Force"), the name by which the Israeli army is still known today.

13. The Bureau of Absentee Property was a division of the Jewish Agency established to administer property formerly belonging to Arab Palestinians who fled Palestine in 1947–1948.

14. The Jewish Agency was established by the Mandate to aid in "such economic, social and other matters as may affect the establishment of the Jewish national home and the interests of the Jewish population in Palestine." An infrastructure of social, political, labor, and military institutions grew out of the Jewish Agency for the benefit of the Jewish population in Palestine. "The Mandate for Palestine, 24 July 1922," in Fred J. Khouri, *The Arab-Israeli Dilemma*, 3rd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), 527–528.

15. Arthur Koestler, *Thieves in the Night* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946). The novel presents a highly romanticized account of a group of idealistic young Jews who escape Nazi persecution and establish a settlement in Palestine in the late 1930s. It projects an image of a land of isolated beauty and tranquility, peopled by a few strong pioneering souls struggling to forge a new future in the face of all manner of hostility and adversity. A few excerpts:

> About half-past five a slight inflammation over the hills to the east showed that the sky was preparing for the rise of day . . . . The new settlers found themselves in the centre of a landscape of gentle desolation, a barrenness mellowed by age. The rocks had settled down for eternity; the sparse scrubs and olive trees exhaled a silent and contented resignation. (pp. 29–30)

> But the distant hills were merely the frame of the picture; the feast for Joseph's eyes was the green Valley of Jezreel itself, the cradle of the Communes. Twenty years ago a desolate marsh cursed with all the Egyptian plagues, it had now become a continuous chain of settlements which stretched like a string of green pearls across the country's neck from Haifa to the Jordan. (p. 228)

> Far off in the night a light had begun to blink; it looked like a red spark suspended in the air . . . .
>
> The distant spark went rhythmically on and off, flash

and darkness, flash, flash and darkness, flash and flash, dot and dash . . . .

They are sending Isaiah in Morse:

And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. (p. 357)

16. Refers to the often quoted slogan, "a land without people for a people without land," coined by early Zionist writers around the turn of this century and eventually adopted by the Zionist movement as a whole to press its claims for the biblical land of Israel promised by God to the Jewish people. The Jews were driven out from Palestine by the Romans in the first century A.D., and in certain religious and Zionist political writings, the land was described as having lain empty, unpeopled, and uncultivated during the intervening two thousand years.

17. Moshe Zalitsky Carmel, Commander of the Carmeli Brigade centered in Haifa, one of the nine *Palmach* battalions in Palestine. The *Palmach* ("Shock Force") were commando units of the Haganah set up in the 1940s.

18. Describes "Operation *Misparayim.*" Britain had announced withdrawal from Haifa for the end of April; then on April 20, she abruptly informed both Jewish and Arab leaders in Haifa that withdrawal would occur that very day. The Zionist forces immediately went into action. A three-pronged attack, called Operation *Misparayim* ("scissors"), was launched on the city and lasted two days. The plan consisted of sending one battalion to occupy the Arab district, another to descend from Mount Carmel toward the commercial center, and a third to go up out of the business district, which was also under Jewish control, to meet the Carmel battalion and cut the city in two. *The Palestine War,* 468.

19. *Irgun:* Also known as *Irgun Tzvai Leumi* ("National Military Organization"), or *ETZEL.* Founded in 1937 and led by Menachem Begin, it broke with the "defensive" Haganah and advocated "offensive" action in seeking to end the British Mandate and establish a Jewish state. Later, a yet more radical splinter group broke from the Irgun and was called the *Lohamie Herut Yisrael* ("Fighters for Israel's Freedom") or *LEHI,* and was known as the "Stern Gang" after its founder, Avraham Yair Stern.

20. Major General Hugh Stockwell, British Commander of Northern Palestine, with responsibility for the British forces in Haifa during the windup of the mandate.

21. Whether or not both Arab and Jewish leaders were informed simultaneously of the imminent British withdrawal has been disputed. Official Israeli government documents state that both were informed at the same time and that the Jews were the first to take advantage of the void left by the British withdrawal by launching their three-pronged attack. The same source also credits the Jews with having superior arms and strategic location in Haifa at the time. *The Palestine War*, 467. British army officer Major R. D. Wilson also states that both sides were informed within an hour of each other, but the assertion is refuted by Walid Khalidi in a footnote, stating that the Jews were given enough advance notice to prepare their attack. *From Haven to Conquest*, 771–773.

22. Saturday is the Jewish Sabbath, during which certain Jewish denominations proscribe the driving of automobiles. Friday is the Muslim Sabbath and Sunday, the Christian. Historically, peoples of all three religions have lived in Palestine, and Jerusalem contains sites held sacred by all three.

23. Through some error, the original date reads "the 30th of April."

24. Acre is a port city north of Haifa located on a promontory and built around a crescent-shaped bay, the main part of the city lying on its western shore. Acre was originally included in the territory allotted to the Arab state by the United Nations partition plan, hence Palestinians evacuated from Haifa were taken to Acre, a boat ride of approximately one hour away. During the mandate, the British maintained their central prison for Palestine in a fortification in Acre, this prison being the site of executions by the British of Zionists convicted of capital crimes under mandatory law.

25. *Ibn:* Means "son of." A man may be known as "son of" his father, particularly if his father is a prominent person. Safiyya here is clarifying that she is thinking of the same person Said refers to when he mentions their former neighbor by his given name, *Faris* al-Lubda, rather than as *Ibn* al-Lubda, the name by which Safiyya apparently knows him.

26. Convent and School of the *Freres des Ecoles Chretiennes*, French missionary schools located in several cities in Palestine.

27. *Manshiyya:* Arab residential quarter in Jaffa, the center of strong and well-organized resistance. The Irgun also had forces in the Manshiyya, and in the early months of 1948 armed conflicts took place between the two sides in the district. The British remained in Jaffa for about a week after their withdrawal from Haifa. Wanting to

avoid a repetition of the mass panic and exodus that had just taken place there, they sent reconnaissance planes over the Manshiyya to survey the Irgun positions and later bombed them. In the final days of April and the first of May 1948, fierce fighting took place among the three factions, with the result that the quarter was almost completely destroyed. What remained was eventually razed by the Israelis for urban development. See *The Palestine War,* 446–449.

28. *Tall al-Rish* (also known as *Tel al-Rish; tall* is Arabic, and *tel,* Hebrew, for "hill"): Originally an Arab town, later a Jewish settlement south of Jaffa.

29. This is the first instance of Kanafani's use of the plural. See Introduction, Note 6.

30. *Shatt al-Shabab:* Literally, "young mens' coast." No reference to its location was found.

31. Possibly a reference to the fact that the British at first bombed Irgun positions in Jaffa (Note 27) to try to keep Zionist forces from seizing the city, but in the end withdrew. May also refer to the armies of the neighboring Arab countries which failed in their attempts to retake the areas of Palestine conquered by the Zionists.

32. Kanafani uses the plural from here to the end of the paragraph.

33. Refers to the Sinai war of 1956 in which Israel invaded the Sinai Peninsula after Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal and closed it to Israeli and other foreign shipping.

34. The statement, *man is a cause* (*al-insan huwa qadiyya*) was taken by Muhammad Siddiq as the title of his book examining the development of political consciousness in Ghassan Kanafani's fiction. The statement itself is ambiguous, since the word *qadiyya* "can be rendered as 'cause,' 'problem,' or 'case,' among other possibilities." Siddiq notes that the "abstract quality of the last sentence" distinguishes it from the rest of Dov's discourse and says that the statement "plays a key role in the novel." In applying the statement to the characters and implications of the novel, Siddiq states that Said's and Safiyya's shortcomings are mitigated by the "moral injustice" they have suffered, while Miriam's "commendable character traits and Dov's correct logic appear less compelling when appended to an unjust cause." Muhammad Siddiq, *Man is a Cause* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), 57–62.

35. *Fida'i,* singular of *fidayeen:* A fighter willing to sacrifice his life for his cause. The term is applied especially to Palestinian free-

dom-fighters, guerillas, or commandos—whatever political faction they belong to—who are ready to sacrifice their lives in armed struggle for the cause of regaining their homeland.

36. In this paragraph Kanafani uses the plural throughout except in the seventh, eighth, and final three sentences where he uses the singular.

37. Again, Kanafani intersperses the plural pronoun starting here and through the fourth sentence, denoting that Said, in response to Dov's condemnation moments before, is now addressing the Jewish community as a whole.

38. The setting off of Said's seemingly disconnected thoughts appears to be deliberate in the original, suggesting Said's anguish as well as his sense of resolve building from his new-found self-discovery. It is an interesting example of Kanafani's ability to move easily between realism and lyricism, melding the prosaic and the poetic.