

SOUTH OF JERICHO

IAMAEL

Iamael Ibn Abu Wazerra went to the Israelis shortly after he witnessed the bombing. He was sixteen and looking for work in the orchards—what a wonder, places that grew sweet fruit on sandy soil with water from the sea. But he had come at the lull in the season; there was no work, not for two, maybe three more weeks.

The sky was clear and not quite blue. It was the heat of the day. Thirsty and foot-weary, Iamael stopped to rest in the shade of a station. Filling his canteen from the pump, he wet his lips. The dust rolled from his tongue. The flies were fat and slow over a trash can that smelled of rotting vegetables. A dog lay panting in the shade under a fruit stand. Dates and oranges and figs. The woman who ran the booth rested in the shady recess of a tent. She let her eyes slip half-way closed. When the next bus arrived she would open one eye, then two, and squint at the travelers who looked over her precious commodities and hope for a few Shekels.



The bus rolled in with a squeal of brakes and rumble of engine, raising a cloud of dust. It was teeming with chattering men, women and children on the road to Beer Sheba. The driver opened the door and the people began to spill out, their feet dusty—the children screaming. One of them was crying.

Just off the bus, a little girl in pink woven sandals and a yellow dress stopped a few feet from Iamael. A little beauty. “Fruit look, Mama. Dog.” She pointed at the stand and the dog, who had lifted his head and panted in the heat. The mother, tired and hot, took the girl by the hand... “Not today.”

The girl’s almond-shaped brown eyes met Iamael’s as she was pulled away by the elbow, fingers in her mouth.

A beautiful child. Iamael could not help it even if she was of the others. He smiled at her. She tagged along behind her mother, her little legs almost running to keep up, but she too smiled. Took her fingers from her mouth and showed him her scattered baby teeth.

Crank, crank, crank. The sound of the bus engine refusing to turn over drew Iamael’s attention away. The Egged (Israeli bus company) bus had filled up again with new passengers. It swayed under their weight.

A dark man wearing sun glasses removed them, sat near the middle of the bus, looking out his open window. The Wahabi’ head dress around his neck he wore Iamael’s uncle Saleme’h’s tribe, Iamael recognized it. The man looked back at him... Deathly still.

Iamael felt the tingle of cold dread up his spine.

The bus. Iamael was on his feet. The bus! The driver cranked the ignition once

more and the engine cranked—and the bus became a ball of flame.

The thunder of it and then a swell of heat knocked Iamael onto his back. His canteen fell from his hand and he heard water splash from it onto ground.

There was a moment of absolute quiet.

Then there were screams. The sound of debris falling. The crackle of flame.

For a second, two seconds, three seconds, Iamael could not think, could not move. He blinked. And the world was newly rushing around him in smoky and earsplitting chaos.

The children. The women. Bodies lay on the ground. Black and red and open and blown to shreds. A brighter red than he had ever seen. A satchel. A pair of glasses. An arm with its bone sticking from oozing flesh. A yellow dress covered in blood... Pink sandals in the dirt. Oh, God. Where are you now? *Allah huu Akbar shu hadda? Great Allah what is this?*
