

Jewish History Final Rabbi Kuperman

From the novel *The Kill Artist* by Daniel Silva (Chapter 23)

(Background: The woman known as Dominique is an Israeli spy named Jacqueline. The man called Yusef is actually a Palestinian terrorist named Tariq.)

“Do you think we should get to know each other a little better, now that we’re officially sleeping together?”

He smiled and said, “What do you want to know?”

“I want to know what happened to your back.”

He turned and looked out the window.

She studied the digital alarm clock on the bedside table.

“There are some things about my past that you might find unpleasant,” he said.

“Bad things you’ve done?”

“No, Dominique. Bad things that were done to me.”

“How did you get that scar on your back?”

He turned and looked at her. “I grew up in a refugee camp in Lebanon - the Shatila camp in south Beirut. Perhaps you’ve heard of Shatila, Dominique.”

“Of course I’ve heard of Shatila.”

“The PLO had offices in the Shatila camp, so when the Israelis invaded Lebanon in ‘eighty-two, they shelled the camp day and night. A missile fired by an Israeli fighter jet hit the building where our family lived. The building collapsed on top of me, and a chunk of concrete tore away the skin of my back.”

“Why were you in Lebanon?”

“Because that’s where my family ended up after they were driven from their ancestral homes in Palestine by the Jews.”

Jacqueline looked at the ceiling.

Yusef said, “Why do you look away from me when I tell you that?”

“I met some Israelis once in a nightclub in Paris. They were debating this issue with a group of French students. They said that the Jews didn’t have to expel the Arabs from Palestine because the Arabs left on their own.”

Yusef laughed and shook his head. “I’m afraid you have fallen for the great Zionist myth, Dominique. The myth that the Palestinians would voluntarily trade the land where they had lived for centuries for exile and refugee camps. The myth that the Arab governments told the Palestinians to leave.”

“It’s not true?”

“Does it sound as though it could be true?”

“Not really.”

“Then trust your instincts, Dominique. If it doesn’t sound plausible, it probably isn’t. Do you want to know the truth about what the Jews did to my people? Do you want to know why my family ended up in a refugee camp in Beirut?”

“I want to know about you.”

“I’m a Palestinian. It’s impossible to separate me from the history of my people.”

“Tell me,” she said.

“We call it al-Nakba. The Catastrophe.”

He had pulled on a pair of loose-fitting cotton pajama bottoms and a London University sweatshirt, as if suddenly self-conscious about his nakedness. He gave Jacqueline a blue dress shirt. It was unspoken, but the implication was clear: one mustn't discuss something as sacred as al-Nakba in a state of postcoital undress. Jacqueline sat in the middle of the bed, her long legs crossed before her, while Yusef paced.

“When the United Nations presented the plan to partition Palestine into two states, the Jews realized they had a serious problem. The Zionists had come to Palestine to build a Jewish state, but nearly half of the people in the new partition state were to be Arabs. The Jews accepted the partition plan, knowing full well that it would be unacceptable to the Arabs. And why should the Arabs accept it? The Jews owned seven percent of Palestine, but they were being handed fifty percent of the country, including the most fertile land along the coastal plain and the Upper Galilee. Are you listening, Dominique?”

“I'm listening.”

“The Jews devised a plan to remove the Arabs from the land designated for the Jewish state. They even had a name for it: Plan Dalet. And they put it into effect the moment the Arabs attacked. Their plan was to expel the Arabs, to drive them out, as Ben-Gurion put it. To cleanse Jewish Palestine of Arabs. Yes, cleanse. I don't use that word lightly, Dominique. It's not my word. It's the very word the Zionists used to describe their plan to expel my people from Palestine.”

“It sounds as though they behaved like the Serbs.”

“They did. Have you ever heard of a place called Deir Yassin?”

“No,” she said.

“Your view of the conflict in the Middle East has been shaped by the Zionists, so it's hardly surprising to me that you have never heard of Deir Yassin.”

“Tell me about Deir Yassin.”

“It was an Arab village outside Jerusalem on the road to the coast and Tel Aviv. It isn't there anymore. There's a Jewish town where Deir Yassin used to be. It's called Kfar Sha'ul.”

Yusef closed his eyes for a moment, as if the next part was too painful even to speak about. When he resumed he spoke with the flat calm of a survivor recounting the last mundane events of a loved one's life.

“The village elders had reached an accommodation with the Zionists, so the four hundred Arabs who lived in Deir Yassin felt they were safe. They had been promised by the Zionists that the village would not be attacked. But at four o'clock one April morning, the members of the Irgun and the Stern Gang came to Deir Yassin. By noon, two thirds of the villagers had been slaughtered. The Jews rounded up the men and the boys, stood them against a wall, and started shooting. They went house to house and murdered the women and the children. They dynamited the homes. They shot a woman who was nine months pregnant, then they cut open her womb and ripped out the child. A woman rushed forward to try to save the baby's life. A Jew shot the woman and killed her.”

“I don't believe things like that happened in Palestine.”

“Of course they did, Dominique. After the massacre word spread through the Arab villages like wildfire. The Jews took full advantage of the situation. They mounted loud-speakers on trucks and broadcast warnings. They told the Arabs to get out, or there would be another Deir Yassin. They concocted stories about outbreaks of typhus and cholera. They made

clandestine radio broadcasts in Arabic, masquerading as Arab leaders, and urged the Palestinians to take flight to avoid a bloodbath. This is the real reason the Palestinians left.” “I had no idea,” she said.

“My own family came from the village of Lydda. Lydda, like Deir Yassin, no longer exists. It is now Lod. It’s where the Zionists put their f**king airport. After a battle with the Arab defenders, the Jews entered Lydda. There was complete panic. Two hundred fifty Arab villagers were killed in the crossfire. After the town was captured, the commanders asked Ben-Gurion what should be done with the Arabs. He said, “Drive them out!” The actual expulsion orders were signed by Yitzhak Rabin. My family was given ten minutes to pack a few belongings, as much as they could carry in a single bag, and told to get out. They started walking. The Jews laughed at them. Spat at them. That’s the truth about what happened in Palestine. That’s who I am. That’s why I hate them.”

Jacqueline, however, was thinking not of the Arabs of Lydda but of the Jews of Marseilles-of Maurice and Rachel Halévy and the night the Vichy gendarmes came for them.

“You’re shaking,” he said.

“Your story upset me. Come back to bed. I want to hold you.”

He crawled back into bed, spread his body gently over hers, and kissed her mouth. “End of lecture,” he said. “We’ll resume tomorrow, if you’re interested.”

Assignment:

You are invited to a presentation by a campus student group called “Dialogue for Peace in the Middle-East.” Their flyer states that “there can be no hope for peace in the Middle-East and a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict if both sides can’t sit down and listen to each other.” Sounds reasonable. You are asked to represent Israel’s position, as you are knowledgeable about Israel and active in pro-Israel events on your college campus. The audience is made up of college students, some pro-Palestinian, some pro-Israel, but most are undecided, not sure which side to believe. The student representing the Palestinian side is asked to speak first. She offers up basically the same narrative that Yusef tells Dominique in the selection above. Then you are called upon. The audience glares at you as if you had stomped on a bunch of cute puppies as you walked to the stage. Clearly they have been swayed by the Palestinian version of events.

What do you say to the once-neutral element in the audience? How can you win them over to Israel’s side?

(You might want to Google “Deir Yassin” before you begin your answer.)

Please answer in three to four paragraphs, and e-mail your response by May 18th to rabbikuperman@gmail.com