

## GAZA JOURNAL

Amin Mousa bounded over the hard clay kicking up dust as he accelerated into the clearing. The lightweight car had poor traction and he braked too late, fishtailing into crates stacked in the house's scant shade. He got out as strawberries rolled to his feet.

His foreman appeared from around a corner. The red dust, collecting on his sweaty scalp, sketched a bloody delta in its deep lines. "These are in bad enough condition already," Rashid said. "Knocking them over doesn't help." He righted a crate.

Amin said, "I thought we'd agreed you'd wait to pick them until I talked to Levy."

"I hadn't counted on that." Rashid waved at the black smoke billowing on the horizon. "Looks like Jerusalem is burning."

"It's a forest fire," Amin told him.

"When that ash reaches here, there'd be no reason to pick these." Rashid set straight another crate of strawberries. "I figured you could work one of your miracles with Levy."

"He's letting nothing cross."

The foreman pulled a cigarette from his shirt pocket. "I'll have these loaded on trucks by sunset."

Amin went inside and let the door slam behind him. The latch rattled in its cradle as it had each of the thousands of times he had shut that door; a punctuation mark of sorts to his coming home, which in happier days had usually been followed by a greeting. "*Is that you, baby?*" or "*Are you home, son?*" But that day no such cheery salutation chased the latch's rattle as Amin passed through the main room. The furniture sat heavy against the white walls, and the

windows, sandbagged by the sky, admitted a castaway light. He imagined the red dust, trickling over thresholds and sifting through windows, performing silent burials.

He mounted the stairs and entered his father's study. The room had the stuffy smell of men's domains, rooms where the scents are not sweet and business is conducted undisturbed by the distractive presence of women. It was in that room where Amin had sorted through his father's receipts and letters, slowly unraveling the family's treacherous state of affairs.

His father's accountancy had astonished him—or rather, the lack thereof. It consisted only of invoices and receipts stuffed into a box. Instead his father maintained a journal, not a diary exactly because his entries weren't made daily. Some of Amin's earliest memories were of his father hunched over the desk filling the tablet's yellowy pages with his articulated script.

Amin crossed the room to open the window. A hot breeze carried inside the scent of lemon blossoms. Sitting at the desk, he lifted the heavy book out of a drawer and opened it to where his father had drawn a thick black line under his grandfather's last entry and written,

*20 December 1955. Father died today. I am 37 years old.*

Amin held the oversized pages by his thumb and let them fall one-by-one, stopping to read random passages.

*4 Nov '56. I am through my first season managing the estate. I think Father would be proud. I'm debating putting 2 hectares into strawberries. (Yasmin promises an endless supply of iced s/b if I do!)*

*25 Dec '58. Just returned from meeting at the Chamber. Seems that Nasser's plan to unite with Syria includes subsidies for farmers (Syria's), and I had hoped Syria's market would open to us! I have just hired a new foreman, named Rashid. He is young, but I've watched him on the crews the last couple of seasons and am confident he'll be fine.*

*14 Feb '59. Decided to plant strawberries. Rashid starts tomorrow. 2 hectares. I can't depend on Egypt this year. Yasmin due next week. I'm hoping for a boy. Amin needs a brother.*

*20 February 1959. Jinan born this morning at 07:45 hours! I've been exiled to my study while Yasmin rests. I wanted a brother for Amin. Instead Ahdaf will have a sister. Rashid's wife had a second son last week (they named him Anwar).*

*25 April '59. The s/berries look good. The rains have helped. We pick the first load in three days. I hope Rashid is back by then. His son (Anwar) died on the 22nd. From fever. I've often worried about losing Amin. At least Rashid has a second son.*

*25 August 1960. It was difficult to leave the old estate. Of course we have not abandoned it – Rashid will manage it while I play gentleman farmer. None of us wanted to move, but it was too far to school for Amin. I didn't want to risk his education. So tonight is our first night at the new farm! And I am in my new study. I thought it would be difficult sitting in this room for the first time, no longer working in Father's study (though I have brought his desk). But I am already settled and will enjoy the hours that I spend here. It is a pleasant room with windows that face west. I can see the sea in the distance. The ceilings are high, which keeps the room cool with the help of a ceiling fan, and the walls are painted entirely white. I haven't hung anything on them yet and may leave them bare. The simplicity of the room is unexpectedly appealing. Yasmin announced she is ready to plant her lemon trees. I am delighted with the site. The sea breezes will carry their scent into this – my – new study.*

— My mother hadn't wanted to leave the old estate. She loved the deep country and the big house, but most of all, she loved the lemon trees. When they were in their fullest bloom, after supper she would stand in the yard, their scent the sweetest at night. In the moonlight you could see their flowers running across the hills. None of us wanted to leave the estate, not only because we would miss the lemon grove, but from the sadness of leaving a well-worn home. It was my father's decision, saying it was fine with him if my sisters were schooled at home but I had to get a respected education, so we moved from the Mousa Estate to a smaller farm closer to town. My mother asked Rashid to clear an area near the house for a small grove. The day after we moved, he arrived with a pickup truck full of saplings he'd collected and nurtured from the estate's old grove, much to my mother's delight. We made a celebration of planting them. My mother, full of superstitions, hung a beaded amulet in the branches of the first lemon tree planted and buried coins in the soil around it. Rashid had brought a mature pine sapling as a gift (what it must have cost!) that he proposed planting in the middle of them. My father was pleased with the tree, which Rashid explained was a rare species for the area, growing taller and sturdier than the local scrub varieties; though he was unconvinced about Rashid's chosen spot for planting it, thinking it would look peculiar amidst the lemons. When Rashid argued the pine would give enough shade to prolong the lemon blossoms, my mother was thrilled. What could my father say? As Rashid promised, the pine grew straight and tall, and shades the grove with its long, needled body, its shadow stretching and contracting with the sun's passage. Now the lemons bloom all year round. —

*17 April '62. I have told Rashid to plant another four hectares of s/berries (replacing tomatoes, some cucs). The Israeli market keeps growing with an endless appetite for fresh fruit. (What they really need are Gaza's fertile fields!)*

*23 March 1963. Indeed it has been a satisfying evening! I have been elected President of the Chamber! I am honored, and am sure Father would be pleased. Yasmin was beautiful tonight, and I was so proud of Amin. He will be like his grandfather, tall and dark, but I worry that he looks too Egyptian.*

— The night my father was elected President of the Chamber of Commerce, *that* was a big affair. Leader of the business community! He was more powerful than anyone, even the Egyptian governor. He was a proud man that night. How strange, then, that he gave a thought to an old worry about being mistaken for an Egyptian. My father considered it a great misfortune that the Mousas were predisposed to darker skin than Gaza's other leading families, and so he instructed me as a child, 'Don't let them mistake you for an Egyptian.' As I got older, it became something we laughed about, as if saying 'Don't let them mistake you for an Egyptian' summed up all advice. We even made a joke of it on the way to the airport when I left for Oxford, but that was years later. —

*16 Jan '64. It is the first night of Ramadan and Gaza is full of life. We just returned from a long walk along the seaside. We stopped at Madame Shawa's for a beer. Even Yasmin took a sip! I had more than one, I'm afraid, and Yasmin was nervous I couldn't drive home. Jinan and Ahdaf are becoming young women. More than one respectable family has calculated when they*

*will be old enough to marry, I have no doubt! And Amin is growing so fast, and so smart. He's my pride.*

*20 December 1965. Father died ten years ago today. It hardly seems possible. There would be so many things to tell him.*

*17 January 1966. Yasmin can't have another child. Jinan's birth damaged her. Now I have only Amin.*

*5 Feb '67. I signed the contract with Floragrow today. They want me to double my production of strawberries. I've instructed Rashid to clear another 6H.*

*20 Aug '67. Bad situation with the Jews here. It's peak harvest, almost nothing going into Israel, and shipments to Egypt are stopped since war. Our market is glutted. We can't sell for cost so I send almost everything to the camps. (The refugees are happy, of course, but how can we manage?)*

— Our lives had been turned upside-down by the Israeli occupation. I was fourteen. My mother refused to let me go to school fearing the soldiers might kidnap me. From the house, we could hear the tanks rumble past on the main road. When I heard them coming, I'd hide in the trees to watch them. Once, a truck drove into our clearing. My father talked to the soldiers and they left. My father was scared but he hid it, and went back to his study. That summer, he spent a lot of time making calculations and writing in his journal. His door was almost always open, though it might as well have been closed. No one dared cross his threshold without an invitation. That was the summer, too, when my parents first quarreled about money. I had never heard them speak of money before, except obliquely, and certainly they never argued about it; but they did then, and those were the only times my father shut his door tight. Almost every day he sent trucks to the

refugee camps. I will always associate the smell of rotting tomatoes with those days, already difficult enough, before everything else happened. —

*29 Jan '68. Back from a meeting at the Chamber. A military officer was there 'to inform the business community that Israel has no intention of withdrawing from Gaza. More: he wants our cooperation in keeping things calm and 'building together the country's economy.'*

*16 June '69. Three trucks (s/b) turned back by soldiers at the border. A new Military Order requires that we have an Israeli business agent. Why weren't we told?*

*18 June '69. Rashid says it's too late for the strawberries, so I sent them to Jabalya and Dayr al-Balah. Tonight the refugees will have something sweet to eat but it's bitter news for me. I have never understood the border delays. They needlessly hurt business, which has to succeed for anything else to succeed, including their damn Occupation.*

*20 Sept '69. I salvaged what I could of the harvest by selling it to Floragrow. I had to accept what they offered. I admit, it could have been less. They know the ruinous state of my affairs, thanks to them. They are only subsidizing inevitable losses that I can't prevent because, unlike the weather, I can't predict what ill-intentioned policy will confront us next.*

*14 Jan '70. Another meeting at Chamber with Civil Admin. Rep. Everybody very upset about new restrictions on farmers. The Rep. said they want to protect Israeli consumers from inferior products. ('What's dangerous about a tomato?' I wanted to ask, but did not.) If we want to sell in Israel, we are required to introduce new species with 'improved nutritional content.' What nonsense! The cost to replace current stock will be prohibitive. Fortunately, F/grow has promised seeds and seedlings at a discount this year, and will buy what we grow (from new stock only). Abu Aysa's seedling business, I fear, will be ruined.*

*23 March '70. Such irony: Abu Aysa reported that Floragrow has contracted him to grow seedlings for the Gaza market! Apparently F/grow is having trouble filling orders. But not so funny: we're paying almost 2x for new seedlings, and Abu Aysa swears they are paying him less. Somebody's making money and it's not us. Rashid wants to try something new: carnations! Where does he get these ideas?*

*29 September 1970. I write this, very shaken by the news. Nasser has died of a heart attack! Only Nasser had the courage to stand up to Israel. I can only fear the worst: the Jews will never leave. They have finally captured Gaza's fertile fields!*

— The depth of my father's grieving absolutely astonished me. For years he had railed against Nasser and his socialist policies, but in Nasser's death, my father saw the end of the possibility of a return to the old order. My father, and the other proud families of Gaza, resented the refugees who had crowded their lands and now vastly outnumbered the original landlords and their inbred families. The old order could return only by ridding ourselves of the refugees and returning them to Israel, and only Nasser seemed willing to try to do that. Or so my father thought, and when I look back, he was right. —

*15 Aug '72. The Egyptian market has collapsed! The new farms around Aswan have flooded the market with crops subsidized by the government. We cannot compete, and the Israelis only give us Egyptian prices!*

*6 Jan '73. Back from Chamber meeting. We met with rep. from Florastar, the new company that purchased Floragrow. F/star wants Gazan farmers to grow carnations; claims there is growing demand in Israel and int'l markets. F/star will handle all sales. Also, F/star will*



*provide seeds/seedlings, special fertilizer, etc. Only condition: min. 10H planted with carnations, otherwise F/star says we are too small. I am studying the proposal. What if the border is closed? Rep. said the government has a stake in F/star, so they can handle such problems.*

*11 Jan '73. Rashid reminded me that he suggested carnations three years earlier. I hadn't forgotten. (I still wonder where he gets these ideas.) After I explained the arrangement – and potential profits – he wanted to plant 30H. We compromised at 20H replacing tomatoes on the north ridge.*

*7 October 1973. We hear that Sadat attacked Israel yesterday, but no one knows for sure. (I never thought he would have the nerve.) The radios are only playing martial music. Everyone is very hopeful this Occupation might end.*

*30 Oct '73. This beleaguered war from start to finish is finally over. Inshallah. I am disheartened by the magnitude of our blunders.*

*9 Jan '74. Back from the Chamber. The F/star rep. was able to enter Gaza. (Maybe F. does have special connections with the government?) He started by saying that they couldn't do anything about the war, sorry about the losses, etc. I asked him why less than 20% of the seeds propagated. Again his 'sorry' and he explained it was an unexpected side effect of a sterilization process. I guess so! F/star is willing to roll over unpaid Shk. into another loan. What about F. sharing our losses? Of course not!*

*3 March '74. I have accepted F/star's offer, and will plant another 10H carnations. Rashid is nervous after last year, but it's a manageable gamble. I expect the Egyptian market to improve this year, and that should cover us.*

*29 May '74. First carnations sent to Florastar. Crossed without a problem. Everything arrived in good shape and F. has accepted entire shipment! Ya Allah!*

*6 Dec '74. Did a reckoning of the year today. Our labor costs, now, are the problem. We have to pay our workers 2x what they pay in Egypt; otherwise, they find work in Israel.*

*Carnations: season started fine, but two shipments left standing in the sun at the airport! Now F/star wants me to plant asparagus: says there's a big market and it's easy to transport. But three years from seed or two years for seedlings before the first harvest? It means I am earning nothing on those hectares.*

*19 Aug '75. Lost second shipment of carnations today. What happened to F/star's government connections?*

*19 September 1975. Received notification today that Florastar has declared bankruptcy.*

— All summer, my father had talked about my going to Oxford. He was so proud to boast about having a son going there, to the point it was sometimes embarrassing. Only days before I left, he learned that Florastar had gone bankrupt. He didn't understand its significance, nor did any of the other farmers who'd become dependent on it. My father asked me to explain what is bankruptcy. If I were headed to Oxford to study business, he assumed that I could; but I hadn't studied business yet, and soon realized that I knew as little as everyone else. —

*29 October 1975. I received the first letter – ever! – from Amin today. How strange that he is not here, the house seems empty. He likes Oxford, although complains about the cold. He wants to find another apt. with a fireplace. Here, it's almost 30° today! I think Yasmin loves the boy more than she loves me. She must have kissed his letter twenty times. (When was the last time she kissed me 20 times?)*

— I laugh whenever I read this entry. I had never experienced cold like England’s cold with its chilled-to-the-bone draughts that invaded my apartment. I found myself forever shivering unless perched in front of a pub’s fireplace; or when I was lucky, in front of the fire in a girlfriend’s apartment, sipping scotch and listening to the rain. For an unmarried and twenty-two-year-old man from Gaza who had never had sex before, let alone with an uninhibited woman, the nights I spent with her were remarkable experiences. We always started and sometimes ended the night in front of her fireplace, in states of such spent and tangy disarray that, as I enter middle age, my memories are disreputable! My father, ever-willing to indulge my whims, agreed that I should find an apartment with a fireplace, though my first girlfriend had spoiled me for all who followed. None was as passionate, and for most of the next four years I campaigned alone against England’s unvanquishable chill with a steady stoking of my lonely fire. —

*12 Dec '75. Back from a Chamber meeting with a rep. from “Florabund”. F/bund wants to buy from us, same as F/star. Thank goodness! I had started to worry that I’d have no Israeli agent in time for the spring crop. F/bund’s rep. says his company has purchased the assets of F/star in a ‘fire sale’. (He said the words in English and I didn’t know what they meant. After he left, I asked the other members, and it turns out nobody knew.)*

*18 Dec '75. It appears that ‘fire sale’ = Abu Aysa’s farm.*

*23 Dec '75. After Abu Aysa’s suicide, I suppose the story had to come out: he had mortgaged his farm to Florastar. To Jews! His family must feel such shame.*

— My father took his friend’s suicide very hard. He wrote about it in one of the few letters I received from him. He was heartsick that a ‘friend and man of good standing had been driven to

such an extreme.’ He didn’t write ‘suicide’ at first, instead preferring less blunt phrases, but finally he penned the detestable word. When I returned home the next summer, anger had replaced my father’s grief. Abu Aysa’s repossessed farm stretched along the main road to town. The new owners had upgraded the greenhouses, added a row of glass buildings further down the hill, and cleared several hectares for open cropping. Every time we passed his friend’s old farm, my father swore and punched the steering wheel. He was furious with Abu Aysa for ‘letting the Jews amongst us’ and chided his friend for believing their promises of wealth. He harangued his absent friend for shaming his innocent wife into an unhappy exile living with her sister in Nablus. “And for what?” he would ask. “To let the Jews steal your farm?” Only water silenced my father. The day we drove past Abu Aysa’s farm, and for the first time saw sprinklers slowly moving across the open fields on enormous mechanical wheels, is the only day my father had nothing to say. —

*7 Jan '76. Back from the Chamber where I met with Sonny, F/bund's rep. He wants me to plant 20H in artichokes! All on the Mousa Estate. Sonny claims soil conditions are better there than on the new farm. He had all the numbers worked out. In four years he showed me how I will repay everything. That would be a relief!*

*15 April 1976. Rashid lost his other son today in an automobile accident. It is such a terrible loss for him. I am very sorry.*

*22 April '76. I found Rashid yesterday. I had never been to his house before and had to ask strangers for directions. He lives in a much poorer state than I could have imagined. He is a proud man, and would have preferred advance notice of my arrival so his wife could have prepared something. I was too anxious to see him to delay my visit. He is tormented by his loss.*

— When I first read this entry, I was astounded to learn that my father had never been to Rashid's home. It seemed so peculiar. Of course, we all knew roughly where he lived. We had driven past the tall stucco walls that encircle his district, and frequently dropped him at the gate leading into his scramble of dusty streets. When I realize that I've never walked through that gate with him, nor seen his home, I am doubly astounded. —

*23 April '76. Rashid returned today. Promptly, he instructed me as to what I had done wrong. He is a good man!*

*1 June '76. The lemon trees are still in bloom. The air is heavy with their fragrance this evening. Whatever our worries, Yasmin finds pleasure in them. For that, I am eternally grateful to Rashid.*

*1 Oct '76. F/bund's water engineer says I could easily double output with two or three new wells, and says there is plenty of water on the estate. (I have always known that.) I would not have lost the artichokes (he says!) with better irrigation. I say, the plants were infected from the start and no amount of water could have helped.*

*10 Oct '76. Met with Sonny today. He had papers for me to sign, giving my permission to start drilling the wells. I said I had agreed to nothing. Apparently the engineer had told him it was 'settled'.*

*19 Oct '76. I refused F/bund's offer today. I am uneasy about becoming more indebted to them. Sonny became quite angry, saying F/bund was offering me 'a way out of my troubles.' A way out of my troubles? I could not believe my ears when they are my troubles!*

*29 Oct '76. I received a letter from Florabund today. They are demanding full payment of everything I owe and will confiscate my crops if I try to sell them in Israel. As an alternative, F/bund wants a mortgage on the estate. What kind of alternative is that? I would never let the Jews have my land.*

*4 Nov '76. Sonny informed me today that Florabund has some new policies. Now farmers must secure their credits. I am quite dismayed by this news and will contact Mazan to see what I can work out. How did I get into this predicament?*

— Willingly, I had avoided involvement with my father's affairs, instead enjoying a life in England which, in all respects, could not be imagined in Gaza. Soon enough I would return home, where certain my mother was scheming an arranged marriage for me. My father's business concerns were matters that I did not want interfering with my last liberated months at Oxford. As a child, I had become accustomed to the vagaries of farming, the predictions of disaster forgotten with the next good season, but I knew little about the actual business of farming. These were matters my father dealt with privately, and in the tradition of Gaza's landed gentry, I would inherit my father's affairs and wealth with little preparation or preamble. Or in my father's case, what I didn't know yet, I would inherit his staggering debt. My father telephoned me the evening of his conversation with Sonny, flabbergasted that Florabund wanted a lien on his land. "On Mousa land!" he shouted, "It's unfathomable!" He ranted against the Jews, raved about connivance and thievery, and hurled unprintable epithets at his dead friend, Abu Aysa. I worried that he might have a heart attack, so upset he was, and it took many minutes to calm him down. That evening, I learned that my father's problems were far more serious than I had ever imagined. He confessed how much he owed to Florabund, but it wasn't until I probed

for more information on the estate's operations that I could put the amount into perspective. My father painted a grim picture of the family's situation. I offered to return immediately, but he insisted I remain at Oxford. He told me he wanted me to be smart enough to run the business when my time came. —

*29 December 1976. Finally, I am finished with Florabund! Sonny was glad to have the money, and we have settled our affairs amicably. My good friend Mazan at the bank was relieved that I did not owe more (I was too!). Still, it was enough. Apparently, the honor of a handshake is a thing of the past. The bank required a lien on my properties, but Mazan assured me it will not be a problem. The bank gave me good terms and the winter crop is coming along, so I am confident all will be fine. By spring, I may drill a new well, inshallah.*

*1 February 1977. The impossible has happened. The Mousa Estate has been invaded by Jews! At sunrise (Rashid tells me), two trucks pulled up next to the old house, and they forced him away with rifles. He then came straight here. We drove to the estate but soldiers blocked us. What can be happening?*

*4 Feb '77. I have been every day to the Civil Administration, but the Commander has refused to see me. I had to make an appointment for two days hence. It's a crazy situation, and no one knows anything. Yasmin is hysterical.*

*6 Feb '77. I am much relieved after my meeting with the C. today. He explained that a new Military Order allows Jews to occupy abandoned property. If the estate had been abandoned – which it is not, as I explained to him: it is still our home, we farm it, and Rashid lives on it – then it would be a different matter. He understood me completely, and said it sounded like a big mistake. Hopefully the problem can be resolved in a day or two. (Yasmin is*

*greatly relieved.) But this new M.O. is troubling. What does it mean? Sadly, I must blame Abu Aysa for this. He brought the Jews to Gaza, and now it appears we must live with them.*

*8 Feb '77. They have put a 'No Trespassing' sign in Hebrew on the Mousa Estate and I was arrested for trying to take it down! A soldier 'escorted' me to see the C., who explained the sign was a mistake. Of course it's a mistake! He said the 'other matter' (as if the 'other matter' isn't the same thing) will be resolved in a day or two.*

*5 March 1977. I was arrested today for trying to walk on Mousa land.*

*13 August 1977. The C. has denied my appeal.*

— I look at these entries written in my father's unmistakable hand and wonder how heavy his thoughts must have been. My mother called with the news. I had just started a new semester at Oxford but returned home immediately. I thought I could help when in reality there was nothing any of us could do. My father went through the prescribed motions, working the system that was in place and always hopeful that the mistake would be acknowledged and the Jews would leave his land; but amongst all of us, only he truly understood what was happening. None of us could believe that settlers had taken the estate. We didn't even know the word before then. 'Settlers' was something new. New and unbelievable, and the rest of us wanted to believe – *had* to believe – their presence was temporary. Only my father sensed their permanence. —

*12 Sept '77. I convinced Amin to return to Oxford for his last year, and he left today. I will manage the fees (inshallah), and he is willing to find a job for extra money. One day he will read this journal. Our history, wherever we end up, is worth knowing.*



*20 November 1977. Sadat has come to Jerusalem! The radio has replayed his speech all day. This is wonderful news! If there is peace, the Jews will leave Gaza!*

*6 Dec '77. Mazan agreed to extend the loan, and says the Board of Directors will 'monitor' – the words people use! – my situation. I am 'monitoring' my situation, too, and unhappily it is a distressing one. But when there is peace, the estate will be returned to us.*

*3 May '78. The settlers drilled two new wells on the estate. One is pumping 2400 lpd, if rumors are accurate. I wish I had that water now. It has been a blistering spring with almost no rain for two months. How long can peace take?*

*8 June '78. Amin returned from Oxford today. A graduate! We had a big celebration. Jinan and Ahdaf and their husbands came, and Yasmin prepared musakhan. The days are long now, and we picnicked in the lemon grove. It's been very dry, but thanks to Rashid, the lemon blossoms are still in bloom.*

*18 Aug '78. We've lost over half the crops. Everything withered before fruiting. It's so dry, and tonight we have a hamseen. The wind carries the smell of Africa. I would enjoy it, were it not so damaging.*

*29 Sept '78. What is Sadat doing? He is negotiating with the Jews for Sinai, not Gaza!*

*12 Oct '78. Mazan came to the farm today. He seemed uncomfortable, a banker without his marble counter. The drought was a disaster. I can't create rain, I told him. When Sadat signs a peace agreement, the Jews will leave and I will have the estate again. Mazan seemed skeptical.*

*27 March 1979. We are without hope. Sadat has traded Gaza for Sinai. The Mousa Estate will never be returned. I fear losing the farm is inevitable, too. Is it possible that this family will be landless? I can not imagine what Father would say.*

Amin let his father's last page fall open.

*12 April 1979. Amin, you will draw a heavy black line under this entry and write 'Father died today,' and you will state your age. It is our tradition, and you will do it. I leave you little but tradition, I am afraid, although I also leave your mother in your care. Your sisters, fortunately, are well married, and they will survive whatever befalls this family. I am worried only for you. How did I not see what was coming? I feel duped by my own bad decisions, and by others who encouraged them for scurrilous gain. For too long, I have blamed poor Abu Aysa for bringing the Jews to Gaza, when of course, everybody has let happen what has happened. We are not destitute, but the farm is lost, and with it, this family's ancestral claim to this land. To Gaza. I am unable to accept the unacceptable, so I will entrust my Soul to Allah. The breeze has the faintest hint of your mother's lemon blossoms tonight. I am glad for that, as I have been grateful on so many evenings that Rashid brought the blossoms to us in the shade of his pine. He is a good man and you can trust him. Forgive me. Your loving father.*

As instructed, Amin had drawn a heavy black line under his father's last entry, and wrote, *12 April 1979. Father died today. I am twenty-six years old.* He never added more to the journal, though his father's entries had followed his grandfather's. Amin had been a young man when he inherited it, too young to feel the need for reflection that age brings; and by the time he felt he had something to reckon for posterity's sake, he was no longer sure that he wanted his story told. Would he want his own son to read about bribes? His treachery in exchange for border passes? His secret support of Hamas? He sighed at the clutter of misdeeds he would need to explain.

Every choice had made sense at the time, for each led back to the same starting point: surviving while saving the farm, and with it the family's legacy.

A tap on the door interrupted his thoughts.

“Yes?”

Rashid opened it. “Excuse me, Mr. Mousa. The trucks are loaded. We still got berries to sell if we can get 'em out. You working on a miracle, or should I tell the drivers to go to the camps?”

“How many trucks?”

“Four. You need to do whatever you can.”

Amin listened to the foreman walk down the stairs. He waited for the latch to rattle in its cradle before he reached for the telephone. “Just one miracle,” he muttered aloud, and dialed a number.

“Levy, here,” it was answered.

“Hello, Major Levy. If we still have an agreement, I have the information that you want.”

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