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Hearts are earned they say, and charms must be made wise.

Miss Israel was facing the exhausted sea. A Parker ink green, crashing like sections of glass. She was bored. Snowbound by fame, inaccessible behind the velvet rope, unseen behind the smoked glass of the limo. She yawned and her mouth opened clean as a cat's or a baby's. She was now housed in the Queen of Sheba apartments in Eilat paid for by the President. Eilat in the south of Israel was a combination of military outpost, vacation centre and shipping port. Eilat was Solomon's great port and the Queen of Sheba landed here to visit Solomon in Jerusalem. She felt like the Queen of Sheba by the Red Sea.

On the night of her coronation she was spun to Stevie Wonder in the President's arms. What a drybiscuit he turned out to be. Warning her about worldly follies and luring baits. How Israel, bounded by territories of aggrieved neighbours, will have to simultaneously fight to defend itself as well as build a sense of national identity out of the patchwork quilt of nationalities. Yes she was an ambassador but she was too excited to put up with a lecture.

She was radiant. Smiling through tears like a sunbeam through rain. Blessed to win the quest she went over the tactless microseconds of the Beauty Queen Parade. Her parents were there. Her mother recited the old stories, each anecdote following the next like rising red balloons: from the moment when the midwife slapped her and she gave an almighty push to when as a 6 year old she asked why Mr Fork and Ms Electrical Outlet could not be friends? Her graduation. She spoke Hebrew and Arabic and Yiddish at home.

The party afterwards was wild. Handsome security men with headsets were popping pills like M&M's. One had gone outside in the street and was soon seen kneeling on a Palestinian's back. He called the others on his crackling walkie-talkie. The old man had broken curfew. He had been carrying a large tray of nuts, which they threw onto the dirt.

The next day Miss Israel found saliva mixed with glitter on the back of the toilet door. Disgusting. Then she remembered her dream. She dreamt of a rifle covered in feathers and a dead bird in a cage.

Through the lattice of her balcony she peered out through slits for eyes at the cloud-blinded sky. She could see harmonies of dome, minaret and octagon. Under the frangipani and scarlet flame trees of Bialik Street, men in white galabiyas nibbled dried melon seeds and sipped sherberts of lemonade. On pavement terraces at brass tables in basketwork chairs she could see handsome men drink cloudy raki. A couple slipped into the side-streets. Olive trees danced in the wind hiking up their pale

underskirts. She was lonely. Heat shimmered off a decommissioned Abrams tank camouflaged by the sand. The Khamseen, the desert wind, blew sand at street level through keyholes in the doors shut against it. The sukkas, or water-carriers sprinkled water from their goat-skins to lay the dust. Smells of camel dung and musk.

She looked at the crown on her dressing table. Try it on like you try on a new life. She wasn't sure of the fit. Back home in Tel Aviv when she got the fidgets, she would file her nails on an emery board. It was her form of spiritual exercise. Now she had a team that would do all that for her. She was relieved to be out of the army, as she looked at her toned café-au-lait legs and ran her fingers along the smooth topography of thigh, touching the fading bruises she got from carrying the rifle. More and more she found herself talking to those jealous female army recruits who parked stubbornly in the backlot of her mind reserved for mean schoolgirls from the past, unplaced Miss World Contestants and old wounds.

She turned on the radio and heard first Aretha Franklin. What was she singing? Stuffing my face with his fingers? Bruising me softly with Islam? Filling me hotly with insects? She switched stations. Yehudit Ravitz. Mazi Cohen. Shlomo Artzi.

Bored, she turned on her computer. But all she got was this, as if MOSSAD were keeping tabs:

Show File Transfer Bar toolbar silent authentication Summary—for Help API open Check Connect secure Email Toggle error Delete to File Select: firewall. Passphrase SSH1 hacker ("tunneling") new Page Contents to Moving Advanced.

Back she went to the balcony. Sweat studded her top lip. Through the double glazing of the window she appeared to have three eyes like those faces on the sides of classical vases. Down on the streets in broad hot daylight, a man with a tambourine led a slim-waisted, crimson-arsed baboon, from a lead around his full mane. She felt so marooned and isolated. She felt like a dream projected on cigarette smoke. She wanted to scream. With an appalling, a terrifying, an unendurable ache Miss Israel then watched an Arab in a coloured waistcoat with his girl twirl arm in arm on the stubbled heath. The girl was happy with her old skirt, and had put a new scarf around her waist. She spun and spun as if it were a votive dance. Gyration, ripples, and a most erotic stillness. *Ya habibi, ya l'eillaili!* sang her consort. With every float of her sunray pleats, they seemed locked forever on a cataract at the edge of time, happy just to be now.

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Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by George Alexander.