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I was put onto the evening Air France flight to Tel Aviv. I did not struggle like the Senegalese, who within the spasm of a few hours flight would be forced to unravel the terror and mortal sacrifices of their clandestine journey through desert and across sea. No, I was going home. I had a window seat. I tried to keep the black chasm of the past months from engulfing my mind from behind. I was served dinner, and red wine. I declined the kosher meal offered by the stewardess, receiving a tray with shrimps and pasta, with a tactful little printed message: 'Air France guarantees that this meal does not contain pork'. They were double-checking, perhaps thoughtfulness, perhaps fear of litigation, but they were clearly not in the know that shrimps were as unkosher as pig.

I was going home to my beloved Jerusalem, just as I did another lifetime ago at the end of so many business trips, the yearning for home tugging me in with ever increasing impatience. I felt this with the reality of an amputee feeling the presence of a lost member. Now I knew that I had four scant hours ahead of me as a free man, an isthmus of quietude before my return to the arena. My mind traced the road up to Jerusalem, a road that Palestinians are not allowed to drive on, and I knew in my heart that I would never be travelling in that direction, that I was headed for a dead end. As best as I could, I quarantined such thoughts from my mind.

We were flying down the coast of patchwork nations formally called Yugoslavia. The sea was full of long islands parallel to the coast, and finally Dubrovnik, an intricate jewel of hills and inlets. The coast thereafter straightened out. They were building a new coastal freeway: I could see the interchanges. As dusk blotted the topography with shadow we went inland over Albania, and by the time we crossed the long diagonal over Greece, it had become utterly dark.

There was a group of rowdy people on the plane, they kept going up and down the aisle, meeting together in lively little knots of conversation. The man sitting next to me was part of them: he kept getting up and returning. I asked him who they were. A group of French Jews, he told me, they were on *Aliyah*, going up to Israel to settle the land. They had left their Parisian suburb together, France had become inhospitable, the Muslims from North Africa had become cocky—they no longer knew their place, he said. They were anti-Semites, fanatics. It was no longer safe to be a Jew in France.

Where would he be living?, I enquired. The Jewish Agency was providing an apartment at a reasonable price in Ma'aleh Adumim, just outside Jerusalem. I asked him whether he knew that this was in the occupied territories. He did, and this appeared to cause him some satisfaction. He told me that if he had had the money, he would live in

the Old City of Jerusalem. If the human rights meddlers prevented them from driving the Arabs out, there was nothing preventing them from being bought out. A bit of intimidation perhaps, and there would be no single Arab left haunting the market. I lived in the Old City, I told him. He looked at me with wonder as if I were a patriot, and I was aghast with myself, as a need to be apologising surged uncontrollably through my chest.

I told him that I was Palestinian, and would live in peace with anyone who wished to share my city. His hackles were raised: the occupied territories were Israel, the Palestinians had lost them because of terrorism. We could only blame ourselves. And suddenly the man sitting next to him, who had been reading all the way from Paris was upright with agitation, he had followed our conversation, he was clearly Israeli. He grabbed my neighbour. 'You know nothing', he said, 'in the 19 years before the Six Days War which conquered the territories, terrorists killed 75 Israeli civilians. And on one night, the 12th October 1953, Ariel Sharon and his Unit 101 massacred 70 Palestinian civilians in the village of Kibiah. They shot at the houses to keep the people inside, and blew them up. I hate the terrorists, but we have as much or more blood on our hands'.

His face was riven with despair. He buried his eyes in his book, as if he had betrayed his own. Then silence.

We had passed over the Greek islands, puddles of glitter in blackness. The eastern Mediterranean is empty. Peering through the window I could guess at the occasional boat. Drawn-out time turned my stomach to molasses, and finally I could discern the thin orange pall of the approaching coast. Suddenly we were crossing low over the beach in Tel Aviv, a powerhouse of street lights on broad avenues, apartment blocks sprawling towards dark horizons. I imagined Gaza not far down the coast, starving in darkness.

As we landed, the passengers applauded, the group of immigrants were straining at their seatbelts, shouting. They rushed out, several did not even wait to leave the aircraft before going down upon their knees to kiss the ground. I was one of the last to leave. I walked along a long corridor, came to a rotunda, which looked down onto a lower level. It might have been the nave of a church—it was the duty free. The corridor continued and I came to a long hall, a broad ramp leading downwards, walled with Jerusalem stone. It felt contradictory going down, one is meant to go up to Israel. At last I was in the customs hall, divided between lines for Israelis and foreigners. I did not know where to go, I wanted to sink to the ground. Finally I forced myself towards the latter.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Joseph Rabie.