

Love Your Enemy?

Novel by

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*"My definition of a tragedy
is a clash between right and right."*

- Amos Oz

A heavy heat encapsules his face when he rolls down the window. Most often they let him pass without asking too many questions. The ID card is tensely clamped between his sweaty fingers. He hands it out to the soldier, who has appeared before the open window. The green uniform receives the identification in an experienced way without seeking any eye contact. They are peers. Seconds in uncertainty pass by in a slow pace before reinforcement is called upon to join the scene. The queue of cars is getting longer and longer and may ultimately not be able to fit the rearview mirror. The soldiers are unexpectedly ordering him to park the car. In a shaky motion he runs the back of his hand back and forth across the damp forehead. His pulse flows in advance. They do not miss one movement of his, when he turns off the engine and against his will steps out of the car.

"Where are you going?"

The air is standing still, saturated with dust, and high temperatures is making the horizon shimmer on a light blue background. Pebble rolls around on the dry, yellow soil after heavy military boots and their required activity. The landscape seems barren. There is no shade anywhere other than under the tin roof of the checkpoint shed. It is skewed, as if it has been randomly discarded and now is about to fall off.

"To my exam at the university in East Jerusalem." He sinks.

The soldier who took his id, fans with it in an almost contemptuous way.

"Are you a Nazi?" The air condenses historic hatred.

"No," he answers and records blood that suddenly can not figure out whether to run one way or the other round his system.

"But your surname is Nazi your little jew-hater" the soldier spydes. "Nazi !!"

Both soldiers stare into Ibrahim's dark eyes, which are confusingly similar to their own. He is glued up the car door, trying to squeeze his head as far back as possible. "My surname has nothing to do with Nazism", he defends himself, "it's just a name."

He does not speak Hebrew as the soldiers, but still understands most of what they say. He speaks English as he knows they probably do not understand Arabic. The soldier, who just entered the scene, takes a step forward and almost bumps into Ibrahim with his shoulder. Hebrew is being replaced by American. Presumably he is one of those youngsters from the country of God, who has sought to find his Jewish roots in Israel, and now provides service in the military just like the rest of the people his age in this country. "Take off your clothes!" All muscles contract. The larynx allows only a whisper from the vocal cords. "The clothes? But ... My exam? .." The soldier lets his M16 slip from the back and to the chest while he maintains Ibrahim with a cold gaze. The stomach turns around. He knows all the stories of Palestinians who questioned their role in confrontation with the Israeli military. The unbearable heat mixes itself with fear and makes the world go round. He is gently bending down, again and again sinking the lump that is about to come out and with difficulty trying to get off his shoes and socks. The pants are easier off while the t-shirt, which is wet of fear, stubbornly clings to the body. The uncertainty is plowing around his throbbing head as he is being pushed down on the ground in a sitting position. He needs water, but it does not seem to bother the soldiers. In boxers and with a deadly race directed against him, he is checkmate in the sun.

Chapter 2 - Copenhagen, February 2014

Astrid pulls down both sleeves over her hands and sticks in the woolly knit to

her fists. The knuckles are white and the nails almost blue. Her legs are crossed and her toes crumb in what used to be warm winter boots. It rustles as on an open train station despite the cafés enclosed square meters with books on shelves from floor to ceiling. The cracks in the bones of the old building are right now defenseless in fight with seasonal cold breath. On the other side of the large windows runs Fiolstræde, where people are walking in irregular paces and in small hops moving from side to side trying to avoid the many sleet puddles. Most of them have the coat pulled up to their ears while bending the head to protect the face from the wind and the heavy rain drops. The enveloping darkness makes it hard to distinguish the movements from one to the other. She takes a sipp of the tea and turns a page in the book.

"As I looked out on the new landscape of hastily-built Israeli watchtowers, it felt as if years had been compressed into weeks, a hideous dream without an end. The charred taste of death and destruction still hung in the air, and the days sank in my memory like particles of bloody dust along with a sickly sweet smell of rotting life and scorched earth. We went, but we got nowhere. We saw, but the reality blurred our vision. We breathed the bloody dust in and out, but we did not breathe. While the crowd grew, I stood on the roof and looked down at my own quiet chaos. We were all refugees. Those who had fled, had been refugees once again on one of the other human storage sites, which were spread out on Israel's short history. And those of us who were left, were prisoners in Jenin. What we were waiting for was freedom. The original hope of going home had become a prayer for elementary rights."

She turns back the pages to the inner flap of the cover, which shows and describes the Palestinian woman, Susan Abulhawa, who has authored "Morning in Jenin" - the book she is now halfway through, the book she borrowed from Khaled's mother, who one day unsolicited brought it to the café where children get help with their homework. "This is our history," she said and almost pleadingly looked at Astrid hoping she would read it. The seven year old Khaled had escaped the exercise of spelling words and looked

first at his mother then at her. "This is our history," he copied his mother and put spontaneously his hand in Astrids. It was the first time he had shown her special trust and looked at her with recognition for being something more than just a random person who had helped him with grammar every week for the past year. Never had she spoken to him about where he comes from or the reason his family came to Denmark long before he was born. She had deliberately avoided, out of fear, to bring it up as she didn't want to be confronted with a situation she knew nothing about. What was she supposed to answer if he would ask her about the conflict in Israel and Palestine? Ask her about something she ought to know, but honestly had not taken the time to understand. All she in high school came to understand was the obvious; that two parties keep fighting over the same piece of land and have done so for too long. For examination, she had not been able to explain the cause of the situation, which had made the examiner frustrated and in the end given her a bad grade. Ever since that experience she has been avoiding close contact with historical, political and religious conflicts, as well as she has tried to stay out of most debates. Although it was another subject she had not participated in the discussion at the auditorium this morning.

"More tea?" The smiling waitress is standing next to her with a steaming pitcher. Astrid hands up the cup and nods as a thank you. The experienced wooden floor creaks when the pitcher disappears back to where it came from. She turns back to the story lying in front of her and allows her eyes to pick up words from the letter, the brother of the Palestinian family has written to his sister in the period after the Six Day War in '67.

"If I stay here, the Israelis will end up killing me. They have all the power, and they want all the land. So far, nothing have stopped them. They have taken everything, Amal. And yet they want more. "

The sound of a huge crack appears.

A man roars in despair, before everything becomes quiet around her. There is spilled tea all over the table. She must have given a proper twitch without having noticed it. She is staring into the darkness, listening and looking around the empty chairs in the cafe. Not until now she notice, that all the other guests have left. Did they hear what she heard? And what had actually happened?

"I can no longer sit powerless and look at it. Forgive me, little sister that I'm leaving. I'm going to fight. It's my only choice. They have determined an existence for us equivalent to a death sentence with no specified date. It is like being a living dead. That is not how I want to live."

Another thunderous sound.
Then it clinks.

Small window pieces rattle to the ground accompanied by angry, Arabic vocabulary and helpless, anguished sigh. The foreign scale of tones ranges from a convincing bass level to an uncontrolled falsetto. She flaps together the book and hear the waitress call an ambulance to report an assault.
Assault?

"One man has beaten up another man. One has black beard, the other one a skullcap on his head. Hurry up!"

Shattered glass sprinkles down the inside of the glass pane, throwing itself on the table and around her chair. The heart is forced up the neck. She pushes herself so hard against the wall's bookcase that she pushes out a book from one end. It plummets to the floor and lands hard on its stomach with the arms turned to the side. A few middle pages crumples, and squeezes the words into pieces that no longer make any sense. She looks at the man with the skullcap, who lies under the broken window almost as still as the book and the smashed letters on the floor. The perpetrator is gone but has left his

hateful aura that seems to still be burning despite the rain. The menacing cry still hangs in the air and hisses "death to the Jews" and "death to Israel". Within a few minutes the hell howls in the distant darkness. The Jewish man has cuts several places after a hostile razor blade.

She is shaking, when she is finally heading home towards Nørrebro by bike. She keeps repeating the waitresses' words to herself: *One man has beaten up another man. One has black beard, the other one a skullcap on his head.* Is it her duty to testify? An indescribable hatred has unfolded before her eyes and has really manifested the conflict, that normally is to find far from the land of yellow mustard fields and broad beeches. A hatred that is no longer outlined in books only, although she would prefer it that way. She is pushing hard into the pedals leaving the secure, Danish landscape to drift by rapidly.