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ON THE GROUNDS OF THE COMPLEX COMMEMORATING
THE NAZIS' TREATMENT OF THE JEWS

The smarter-than-average, smaller-than-average Israeli man in his middle thirties had been for a time a freelance journalist in Jerusalem, the city in which the state of Israel constructed its massive complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. His work of late had been sub-par, and was never exceptional to begin with, but he had, for a few years, enough persistence to carve out a living. He was single again after a three year marriage to a woman taller than him, who doomed the marriage by formally announcing her reluctance to reproduce at any time with her husband despite the implications of their marriage contract, though they both agree now, not that they talk much, that it was for the best they never made another person. But his work had slipped, along with his enthusiasm for his trade, and he stopped writing, stopped looking for projects, and was eventually replaced on a list of regular contributors to a Jerusalem weekly by another shortish Israeli journalist of which there are many.

One of his friends managed the coffee shop at the Jerusalem complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews, and this friend offered the failing journalist a job working the cash register. The offer was a joke, made in response to a three minute monologue by the failing journalist about his professional woes and financial constraints, but the failing journalist professed interest in the offer. He hoped, in vain it would turn out, that such work would serve as a welcome respite from the doldrums he arrived at as an idle journalist. He hoped, in vain, that the mindless labor of working a cash register in the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews would afford him the opportunity to gain perspective on his situation and summon the energy necessary to get his life back on track. When accepting the job and its low pay he did not consider at length the effect working within the complex would have on his larger attitude and condition. The friend who offered him the job did ask, bewildered, "You want to work at *Yad Vashem*?" stressing the name of the place in order to draw his friend's attention, that is the failing journalist's attention, to the fact that he would be working in the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews, and that in other

words this was no typical work place, that this was exactly *not* just another coffee shop cash register he would be sitting behind for hours each day. The friend who offered the job could have, and perhaps would have under different circumstances, detailed what precisely working in the coffee shop of the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews involved, in terms of the general mood and atmosphere of the site, the impossibility of either ignoring the purpose of the complex or engaging it fully, the frustration one encounters time and again alternating between disdain and pity for the endless stream of customers, customers from all over the globe, who somehow have an appetite after touring the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews, even those customers who do or don't go to great lengths to conceal those numbers poorly written under the surface of their skin by the Nazis *while* they were being treated by the Nazis, but who luckily, one imagines with important reservations, were not given the full treatment, as it were. The failing journalist, soon to be cashier at the coffee shop in the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews, both did and did not hear his friend's words, in the sense that he heard the sounds, the words themselves, but did not make the intended connections, this failure itself loosely akin to the inability the manager friend could and would have detailed concerning the possibility of ignoring or understanding what it means to work in the complex to begin with.

Six weeks into the job, the one time failing journalist had come to view himself as the on-edge, almost maniacal cashier in the coffee shop in the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. He had come to realize that he was in no condition mentally, both in general and most certainly recently, to be in such regular contact with the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. He did not benefit from the brief walk through the main doors of the complex each day affording him a glimpse of a few distant photographs detailing some unhappy chapter of this most unhappy story. He could not tolerate or cope with the unique strain of mostly silence which filled and made heavy the very air of the complex. He did not enjoy thinking, hearing in his head the word "Nazi" as much as he did once he began tending the cash register, propped up on his small black stool which made his back sore, nor did he enjoy thinking and in his head hearing "Treblinka," "the final solution," "Dachau," "gas chambers," "crematorium," "Zyklon B," "SS," "Hitler," "six million," etc., or their Hebrew equivalents. He took no pleasure in watching the occasional beautiful woman who en-

tered the coffee shop, for he felt bad coveting in such a place, felt bad if he smiled due to his coveting, felt bad if he denied himself and her such a harmless smile if he censored the smile and resisted his coveting. He did not like working in the coffee shop in the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. Not at all. Lucidly, he concluded his life was falling apart, collapsing inward as he manned the cash register in the coffee shop of the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. He sensed a loose but meaningful affiliation obtaining between the endless stream of random numbers appearing on the cash register each day and those overwhelming numbers associated with the events commemorated in the building at which he worked. Somehow all these numbers meant something similar, he thought. He felt a pathetic, lonely urge to address his customers, to let them in on some of his misery, to ask directly for their assistance or at least their sympathy and prayers in his effort to return his life to what it had once been. The absolute restriction on such behavior was painfully clear to him, and this only increased his suffering. He tried somehow to bond with his customers as they filed past him unceremoniously each day, to communicate with his eyes and those muscles around his mouth his hope they enjoy their meal, snack, or drink. He strove to brighten their day with his Israeli equivalents of "thank you," "you're welcome," and "have a nice day," yet knew even the most heartfelt deliverance would not penetrate most patrons' obliviousness to his very existence. He yearned to offer jokingly "*B'ta'avon*," that is "Bon Appetit," but he restrained himself, knowing how vastly inappropriate such levity was in this heaviest of coffee shops. So he sat, hunched in his melancholy, hoping for incidental finger to palm contact between cashier and consumer, hoping for some misunderstanding requiring an extended dialogue to clarify things. He wanted to no longer work in the coffee shop of the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. But he was quite poor and quite unmotivated, and during the five weeks and three days following the first two days of his employment as the afternoon cashier, although these two days offered more than enough time to conclude that this was no place for him to work, he had yet to muster up the energy sufficient to find another job. He was, he concluded, depressed. His shame at suffering from such a condition during a time and in a place worlds better than the world in which the Nazis so mistreated the Jews did nothing to improve his state. Nor did it motivate him to find another job.

The American, three plus inches taller than the cashier, was in mid-level management in a technologies firm located in the American state of California. He entered the coffee shop in the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews to purchase and consume a baked good and some juice. The American had been sent to Israel along with a co-worker to meet with an Israeli firm to discuss the possibility of undertaking a joint venture developing technologies related to computer automation in the Middle East. The American was Jewish, albeit assimilated. He spoke no Hebrew, and despite three years of Bar Mitzvah training during his pre- and early adolescence, he recognized only a handful of that language's letters, and could do nothing concrete with this limited knowledge. He had for a time in his early twenties considered investigating his Jewishness further, this inspired by the enthusiasm for the same faith shown by his then-girlfriend, who he admired very much and loved dearly, but who eventually terminated their relationship when she concluded that though this American boyfriend was physically attractive and above average in intelligence, he was not extremely intelligent or intensely attractive or really interesting for that matter. She concluded that out in this great, big world was a man who was simply more of a man than this American boyfriend, so she slowly, methodically, and intentionally undid the ties connecting them until that was that. During his brief, five month tour of his Jewishness he read a handful of books, attended four lectures, and waded through the newspaper with a slightly altered sense of purpose. As best he could tell, when one got past the American Jew's interest in who else in America—from celebrities to closeted coworkers—was Jewish, American Jews' two main interests seemed to be the Holocaust, as he often heard it called, and the state of Israel. He, of course, was familiar with both entities on some superficial level. Right below the threshold of consciousness he sensed he should, as he explored his Jewishness, choose either the state of Israel or the Holocaust, as he often heard it called, as his main Jewish interest. Both interested him in different ways, though the Arab component of the state of Israel—Palestinians, Israeli-Arabs, wars, refugees, terrorist incidents, occupation, etc.—confused him terribly, so he drifted toward an interest in the Holocaust. Reading Leon Uris' *Mila 18* and attending the first six hours of Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, as the Nazis' treatment of the Jews is referred to in Hebrew, confronted him with an intense set of emotions he could not express to his then-girlfriend. He felt that his effort to become a newly aware Jewish adult, or more precisely his effort to communicate to his then-girlfriend his

program of becoming a newly aware Jewish adult, hinged on his ability to speak with some degree of adroitness about these feelings and the confusion they bred within him. But he could not, really. He had a few ideas, but nothing unique and certainly nothing compelling enough to raise him above the host of clichés which so dominate the world's understanding of the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. For a time during idle moments he would contemplate the numbers tied to the events, dividing the figure 6,000,000 by days in the week or months in the year, or estimating the average height of the victims, something along the lines of "if all the victims of the Holocaust were lined up end to end they would stretch from here to" When this macro approach bore few fruits in terms of girlfriend-impressing eloquence and profundity, he swung to the other extreme, concentrating on individual stories, searching for that anecdote among the rat-filled cellars and benevolent gentile attics of survivors' memories able to contain the meaning and significance of those events. To no one's surprise he failed, and in time his girlfriend left him, though it would be unfair to blame the Nazis' treatment of the Jews for the demise of their once promising union.

Some years later, informed he was to be sent to the Jewish state on a business trip, he decided he would visit the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. Near the end of the trip, when most of the significant meetings concerning Israeli automation and efficiency had concluded, he excused himself from his co-worker and commandeered a taxi and instructed its driver to take him to the complex. He was impressed by its gardens and outdoor sculptures, but entered the main building with a foggy trepidation, the cause of which he had difficulty locating. As he navigated his way through the main time-line of the events, past placards bearing photographs of the ghettoed Jews of Europe, past reproductions of anti-semitic brochures boasting caricatures of sex-starved Jewish men with absurd hook noses, past diagrams explaining the Nazis' racial theories, past a German tour group stumbling slowly along as well, he discovered himself wistfully recalling, not once or twice, but upon nearly every footfall, that bright, comely, strikingly beautiful Jewish woman whom he so admired as to undertake an intensive, for him, five-month independent study of the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. That this complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews activated his memory of her did not surprise him, but the stubborn regularity of this recollection, the refusal of the image of her face in his mind to retire to accommodate a paltry ninety-minute reflection on the Nazis and their treat-

ment of Europe's Jews disturbed and upset him greatly. The further he walked into the narrative of the Nazis and the Jews, many rooms past the well-lit entrance, past 1935, 1938, 1940, into the years of the gas chambers, to the photographs of countless anonymous skin and bone corpses piled one on top of another in vast pits, the more he was overcome with the bitter disappointment of his inability to win over his beloved's heart in the early years of this decade. He continued, intermittently passing the same German tour group the way you encounter again and again a fellow supermarket patron who has chosen a slightly different route through the aisles, but a route managing to still overlap at times with your own. He was nearly certain they were indeed Germans and this only confused him more, as if they were sent there en masse to remind him of his reason for coming in the first place. This is not to say that he was as coarse as to be unaffected by the complex's effort to communicate the full horror of the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. He was alternately saddened and outraged, and this did not make things any better. But after years of working through the injuries of her rejection, after convincing himself of the worth of his present lover and soon-to-be-wife, he could now almost smell the devastation to be realized as his pure love for his past girlfriend rekindled before a glass case exhibiting the blue striped uniform of a concentration camp prisoner.

Near the end of the tour he stood inside a final room (with the strikingly downtrodden German tourists) summarizing the numbers generated by the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. Mostly numb, nervously fumbling Israeli change in the right pocket of his well-pressed American slacks, he reviewed the country and camp totals presented on plaques throughout the room, different ways of breaking apart the number six million. He stopped at the number one million five hundred thousand, the number of children murdered by the Nazis. He decided this was a truly novel way to think of the events, but soon disassociated into a consideration of the cut-off age for children as determined by whoever computed this figure—13, 16, 18? These damned children caused him to miss the unborn children of his stillborn union with that paragon of Jewish beauty and wisdom. All this made him hungry and thirsty. Tired and hungry and thirsty.

In the coffee shop the American bought an Israeli baked good, an odd hybrid between the cinnamon roll and marble cake, a large, dense doughy thing promising mass if nothing else. To wash it down, the far-from-home business

man selected a grape juice drink, bottled in a comically small container, somewhere in the area of 280ml capacity. The American had discovered the beverage earlier in the week, the color appealed to him. Back home the size would have served as a deterrent. But abroad, meticulously collecting receipts without further care, his need to purchase two such grape drinks at a single sitting bothered him not at all. As he made his way toward the aforementioned down-and-out cashier he made a mental note of the likely ratio of grape drinks to baked goods this snack was likely to require (2:1), but elected not to buy two when there was still an outside chance that one would be enough.

The problem, it would turn out, would have nothing to do with the grape drink and everything to do with the baked good. It was not fresh, and while certain baked goods age well, while indeed certain baked goods are manufactured, indeed mass produced, with the phrase “long shelf life” in mind, this particular baked good was made with the expressed purpose of being consumed within 72 hours. The company rep, who coordinated this particular account here in the coffee shop in the complex commemorating the Nazis’ treatment of the Jews, communicated this to the manager of this same coffee shop (the aforementioned friend of the cashier) when the two met for the first time. He told the manager that his company would deliver twice a week, and that he should order only for the three day period between deliveries (the week rendered essentially six days due to cessation of all activity on Saturday). The manager eventually ignored this advice, choosing instead to place his orders with less precision, erring on the over-order side, thereby forcing the average baked good to inhabit the halfway house of the coffee shop display case for, on average, over 100 hours. The manager made this policy decision because he did not believe typical patrons of this particular coffee shop, that is the coffee shop in the complex commemorating the Nazis’ treatment of the Jews, would bother to voice complaints concerning the freshness of their baked good after spending the afternoon contemplating all varieties of starvation, emaciation, etc.

Our American, on this day, was different. He entered the café in a state his mother used to refer to as “ungy,” a term describing that childhood mood of crabby self-pity specializing in the generation of yet more crabby self-pity. As a boy in a restaurant not of his choosing, or in the car on the way to visit family friends not of his liking, our American would cross arms pouting, defiantly intransigent in his self-absorbed protest. His mother—who today

back in the suburban Midwest drank her diet formula milkshake with pride, beaming because her son was bringing economic prosperity to the Holy Land, preparing it for the next century, this generation's Ben-Gurion—would after a short round of negotiations and pleas, announce with sarcasm the arrival of this ungy attitude, often using the third person even if the two were the only ones in the car. Among his elaborate arsenal of manipulative childish behaviors, unguiness was among the less effective, yet he employed it often. There is no reverse out of this mode, he could only ever trudge forward, until exhausted and bitter his tears or screaming would ignite. Then mom would respond impatient and bitter, another painful family episode concluding only because it must.

It took only two bites of the once fresh baked good for the American to realize the substandard quality of his purchase. He tugged and tore at it for a minute more, verifying with his eyes and fingers what his mouth already discovered. Falling swiftly down his ladder of global historical consciousness, past the Nazis' systematic murder of the majority of Europe's Jews, down beyond even his self-centered remembrance of his own past, past his former girlfriend's dismissal of him as unworthy, this American fixed his sights firmly on this poor baked good, put his proverbial foot down as he rose to voice his displeasure with who else but our equally troubled Israeli cashier.

Patron: This is stale.

Vendor: Stale?

Consumer: Yes, stale, it is not fresh, it is no good.

Cashier: I know what this is, "stale."

American: Well, then, it is stale.

Israeli: Why do you think I will know what is this thing "stale?"

Businessman abroad: Well I wasn't certain, I tried to explain—

Ex-journalist: This is the American arrogance at its finest. You are in Israel, in the middle of the Mideast, and you are saying stale. Why must I know what this says?

Pressed slacks: But you knew.

Jean shorts: This is not the matter. What if I am not knowing? If I am entering an American café and complain "*Ze lo Tari*" no one is helping me, not until I say this thing in English.

Scorned boyfriend: Please, I just want my money back.

Scorned husband: A refund? Say it, I know this word. I lived in your decadent, yes I know also this word, decadent United States for two years,

more or less, reading your idiot newspapers, watching your stupid television, speaking this ugly language.

Upwardly mobile: Sir, please, I just want—

Bottoming out: Don't fucking call me "sir!" I'm a cashier worker you mother fucker son of a whore!

Exasperated: Fuck you. Take your fucking shitty roll, fucking Israeli asshole!

And in a gesture wildly out of character, the American, before storming angrily out of the coffee shop in the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews, seized the surviving remains of the roll and threw them with some force at the Israeli who sat no more than four feet from him, hitting him squarely on the left cheek, causing physical pain for a moment or two, leaving a line of sticky sugar goop just below his glasses. A much older Israeli man, originally from Galacia, who lost much of his extended family during the Jewish genocide at the hand of the Nazis, who spent at least two days a month here in the complex commemorating these events, muttered loudly, "enough, stop," in heavily accented Hebrew. Others in the café turned their heads to look, vaguely sensing the need to intervene after internalizing the lessons of this complex, the need not to remain passive and silent in the face of injustice, but they, too, were tired, and the brief quarrel ended before anyone could summon the resolve to act. The tension subsided as the furious cashier removed the ex-baked good from his face and shirt collar, cursing to himself in Arabic, because Hebrew has no good curses.

Just outside the central building in the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jew the confused and upset business man sat upon a bench and caught his breath. The late afternoon sunlight dazzled him, and he felt as if he had just left an engaging matinée, the bright day smashing to bits in his recent, receding memory the world projected upon the screen just inside the dark movie house. He laughed to himself, embarrassed, amazed, still hungry. The regular foot traffic of the complex passed him unaware, though he felt a palpable need to respond to them, to show his amused disbelief at the events which had recently transpired. If he still cried, like the ungy boy he had once been, he would have cried. It had been an exhausting day, not what he expected, and he wished he smoked cigarettes. He thought this would be a good time to concentrate on the smoking of a cigarette.

After a time the American rose to wander about for a few more minutes on the grounds of the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the

Jews. His business was done here, but he wasn't ready to leave. He wanted to add a layer of pleasantness to cover over the coffee shop incident. He welcomed eagerly the mood of the sprawling complex, centered by the sense of purpose this site of perpetual mourning enjoys, however somberly. He walked lazily. He grinned slightly. He fumbled the new combination of Israeli coins in his left pant pocket. He would need to get these pants pressed before his final meeting tomorrow. He should call his fiancée when he returns to the hotel, but he couldn't decide if he would tell her about today.

Meanwhile the Israeli cashier, nearly spinning out at the edges of self-control, sat stewing in his fury a few moments more. Embarrassed, confused, humiliated, and further embarrassed, confused, and humiliated by his embarrassment, confusion, and humiliation, he noticed how difficult breathing had become. His vision seemed blurred. He motioned to a coworker, muttered something unintelligible in any of the thousand tongues of this planet, and stumbled toward the exit of the main building in the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. The cool air immediately soothed him, lowering his anxiety to something merely disturbing. He lowered himself on a large rock and began to smoke a cigarette.

"*Sliha*," it was the American trying out the one word he had learned on his trip, Israel's version of "excuse me." If he had known the condition of his addressee he would not have addressed him at all, but he did not know, and, as stated earlier, he did want a cigarette.

The Israeli on self-imposed break raised his head in a jerk and mustered up just enough control not to respond initially. He lowered his head, sucked on his cigarette. "It's '*slich*a,' there's a 'cha' sound, you should feel it in your throat."

The American tried again and almost succeeded, "*Slichka*, you wouldn't happen to have an extra cigarette?" He thought they might laugh about what had transpired inside. His embarrassment, confusion, and humiliation manifested itself as giddiness. The Israeli reached into his front pocket and removed the box of cigarettes, the word "Time" written on the white container. He continued smoking with his head down as he extended the cigarettes to the American. The American removed a cigarette from the box, placed it in his mouth, and removed the book of matches that had been tucked smartly in the cellophane wrapping which still covered two-thirds of the box. His hand shook a bit, because he felt naughty. He didn't smoke. He

had smoked, all told, eleven cigarettes in his life, seven of them during the same drunk evening/night in college eight years ago. But seeing so many Israelis smoking everywhere in apparent apathy to its effects roused in him a desire to join in, to go native in this very way. He lit the cigarette, and inhaled, pleased to have embarked on this adventure. For a moment the enduring silence bothered him, then he concluded it enhanced the absolute coolness of the moment. He wished his pants and shoes were not in such good condition.

The Israeli dared not raise his head. He had entered the unpleasant territories of irrationality and paranoia far enough to suspect that this American was not the cheery tourist he pretended to be. The on-break cashier worried that a security guard had already been summoned and was on his way to confront him. He considered rising and walking straight to his Vespa scooter, driving home, or even better, to a bar he visited on rare occasions. He smirked, catching himself in such senseless worry. But, still, he preferred staring at the ground straight ahead. Anything else was too much just now.

The American experimented with different holds, with inhalations of varied length, with exhalations both vigorous and casual. Then came a lull of foolishness, of anticipated regret for how his mouth would feel in ten minutes. Heavy, puffy, somehow dying ever so slightly. Smoking is stupid after all. He broke the silence by apologizing to the cashier for throwing the roll at him. The Israeli remained silent, and the American felt uncomfortable. "Forget it," the Israeli said, his voice calm in the way one's voice is calm when trying extremely hard to sound calm: a bit too loud, slow, finally cracking to betray the speaker.

If either the Israeli or the American had eyes on the back of their heads, he would have been able to see an Israeli guide lead around the grounds of the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews, of all things, the same German tour group. The tour guide, fluent in German of course, but not a survivor in any literal sense, specialized in the German tourists visiting his country. Initially he took sadistic pleasure in the *Yad Vashem* part of each tour, something few Germans had the guts to sidestep, though most of them were there, that is in Israel and its occupied territories, to see where Jesus had been during his brief, but vital to them, life. Later on he began to sympathize ever so slightly with the Germans, most of them just young enough to mathematically be eliminated from direct responsibility for their nation's treatment of

the Jews. Each tour at least one or two would have a really tough time of it, breaking under the cruel burden of something too big for even the broadest Bavarian shoulders, and the whole tour group would project a nearly sour smelling dark disappointment, their pilgrimage in honor of the Son of God rained upon. And of course this rain and the Son of God in the final account were not totally inseparable, the Jews and the Jewish Jesus did dovetail for a while there with unfortunate results; one of the longer misunderstandings to date. But now he had come to dread this day. Often on this day he would sigh slowly and remove his spectacles to clean them with his shirt. He spoke with little drama and allowed long silences to prevail. Not for effect, but because he didn't want to be involved in the day any more than necessary. After the trip he would round up his sheepish, nearly lifeless tourists and return them to their hotel, each one of them silently grateful to have a Jew tell them what to do. He would then retire to a nearby bar and drink a few bad Israeli beers. The Germans would remain in their hotel rooms, ashamed and stoneface, watching television.

"Please get away from me," the Israeli pleaded after another silence.

The American sat quietly, and almost rose, but weathering the first instant of defiance realized he could, if he wanted, remain right where he was.

"Get away from me, please," the Israeli's speech crescendoing, his abnormally round head filling with blood.

The American, his courage and giddiness inflated by his initial refusal offered, "It's 'go away.' Not 'get away,' and you don't need the 'from me.'" He smiled, quite pleased with himself.

There was a pause during which the American concluded that this section of their dialogue had ended, that the Israeli had been won over by his cheerful cleverness. The American could only understand this moment by identifying himself as yet one more incarnation of one-half of any of a few hundred odd couples from the cinema and television. Men, who despite all varieties of difference, ranging from dress to political convictions, come to like and even rely on one another. The American took an extra long drag on his cigarette, they really were different and would make a great team.

"Go away, fucking bastard," the Israeli pushed the American in the torso, causing the American to lose his balance on the rock. He prevented a complete fall by quickly placing his open palm on the rocky walkway, skinning his hand just a bit. His clenched lips alone had to maintain their purchase on the

cigarette, but they failed, and the much shortened cigarette fell lazily to the ground. It rolled swiftly, drawing out a half circle, bits of ash here and there.

“You son-of-a-bitch,” the American responded. He picked up the cigarette, suffering from ice-cream-cone-on-the-pavement thoughts. He threw the still lit butt at the Israeli. “What the fuck?!” he added, like a good American.

The Israeli did not mean to stand fully erect and so challenge the American, but he was drawn by a blunt urge to close the distance between himself and the American, and there was no way to do this but to stand. Schooching over was all wrong in this situation. He had no plan, no concrete intention, just a base need to encroach on the other man’s space. As he neared, the American, 0-1-1 all time in fights, lifted his right hand toward the Israeli’s face. The hand was neither fist nor palm, had not been instructed to function as either punch or push. But this mattered little. The Israeli was, after all, a one-time soldier (who still served in reserves 6-8 weeks a year) trained in a very basic but effective Israeli military form of martial arts, a combination of judo and simple street fighting. Without much thought, his left hand intercepted the American’s right hand. After redirecting the American’s hand past his own left shoulder, the Israeli redirected his own hand, landing the ball of his palm squarely on the American’s lower lip with adequate force. The lip split and blood rushed unabated out of his face and into the air where it fell to the ground of the complex commemorating the Nazis’ treatment of the Jews, the dozen or so wide drops drawing out as they hit the ground, aesthetically pleasing shapes and images in some abstract sense. The American stumbled backwards and fell. The Israeli stood, heaving, his hand partially bloodied. The cigarette smoldered. The sky was blue with the right amount of clouds.

The tour guide continued in his impeccable German, standing between twenty-six mute Germans—each trying in his or her own private way to figure out how to apologize to an entire religion, each wishing memory and state policy showed no interest in genealogy, now or then—and a massive bas relief sculpture. The sculpture was a weighty snapshot of eventual, allegorical genocide etched deep into a sixty-by-twenty-foot wall of stone. The elongated figures, the Jews and their persecutors, bent up and away from each other, stuck in a moment but stretched over time in silence and horror. The guide, in his worn-out shoes, clutching lazily his day pack, addressed his Germans, pausing often to allow the others to consider the frozen scene. “And this boy, this

innocent child, seemingly not of this scene. He is both in the center, and yet somehow he steps out of the rock toward us. How? Why? Because he alone looks out at us, at each one of us. With his eyes, he transcends this stone and enters our world right now. The pure eyes of simple youth ask us, demand from us an answer, 'Why do you just stand and look? Why do you do nothing?' Finally he asks, 'If it is too late now,' and surely it is, 'will you act next time, will you prevent this next time?' This is the question and this is the lesson." And the guide lowered his eyes, dominated from all sides by fury and shame. This boy, the one from the famous photo. His arms raised in the Warsaw Ghetto, too young to possibly understand. The same photo produced by that maniacal bastard Begin when asked to justify Beirut. That boy.

The American eventually stood back up, dabbing his lip with some of his receipts. He found a bathroom located on the grounds. He washed up and considered the small rip near the knee of his slacks. Inside the coffee shop of the complex commemorating the Nazis' treatment of the Jews, the Israeli, whose hands were recently washed but who continued sweating slightly, returned to his stool indifferent to his possible futures. In a few moments the Germans would enter, passively led by their Jew. They would buy all matters of food stuff, including stale baked goods, and they would eat every last bite, tasting nothing. The guide with his coffee would come through last, his heavy, full, red beard just on this side of prophecy. Looking at our Israeli, he would enjoy the pleasure of his discomfort abating slightly. He would smile and say to the cashier, in a soft, intimate Hebrew, "How's business?"

"Not bad," the Israeli would respond with a tired grin, clutching his scalp pensively below his close-cropped hair, "not bad."