

Radius

...it is nor hand, nor foot,

Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part

Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!

What's in a name?

— *Romeo & Juliet*, Shakespeare

[Part 1](#)

[Part 2](#)

[Part 3](#)

Dear Khalilia,

When you are born you don't pick

Your parents

Your country

Your religion

Your friends

Your neighbour

Your family.

Your lover.

These things are provided, and perhaps taken away, through no virtue of your own.

When you die. You realize that you chose everything.

Mustapha.

Part 1 – *I'll Hide It Behind Something*

Unbeknownst to Khalilia and Omar, on the third anniversary of Khalid's death, someone must have finally convinced a hopeless Mustapha, for he awoke one morning with the sole intention of meeting Yakub, his best friend, for one last glass of cardamon tea, after which he would take his own life.

He awoke as he had any other day. He lay curled up in his bed, a mattress coming undone on the floor, listening for the sounds of movement outside his framed doorless entry, where a thin, ragged sheet — masquerading as a door — hung motionless. Although the length of time that he remained in bed varied, it was always only the sound of Omar that stirred him.

As the sun radiated on his back, he imagined how different his life could have been. How different *he* could have been. It seemed arbitrary to be born in Gaza. He could just as easily have been born in Israel. He could have been his Canadian cousin. Or an Azorean gazelle.

Mustapha was leaving the house that he shared with his sister in-law Khalilia and nephew Omar. Mustapha was already at the door, reaching to pull it open when Khalilia came running. "It's Canada," she said.

Omar waddled behind her, holding a wooden block, gesturing to his ear, while imploring Mustapha to answer the phone. Mustapha stood motionless, somehow debating the merits of answering an international call from his cousin, an oddity not lost on Khalilia. "It's Canada," she repeated.

After Mustapha hung up, Khalilia looked forlorn, her face drooped, accentuating her dark brown, gazelle-like eyes, and long, black eyelashes.

"The money transfer is being held," he confirmed.

“Da Da,” said Omar, who never knew his father. He reached up with the block, urging Mustapha to answer his domestic call. Omar placed the block to his own nose and said “Allo.”

“You are a mischievous little one, aren’t you? Aren’t you?” said Mustapha, lifting Omar higher, tickling his belly with his nose with the repetition of each question. Omar’s laughter, like fingertips, ran across an invisible mesh inside Mustapha’s chest, the reverberations disturbing his heart and lungs. His nephew was an exact replica of his father.

“I will take you to the zoo,” Mustapha said, passing him back to his mother’s arms. Khalilia smiled, which comforted Mustapha.

“We will see the gazelle,” he said, pausing, wiping his forehead with his wrist. “You’ll have your antelope. *Inshallah*, there *will* be work today.”

Khalilia’s free arm reached out, settling half on the back of his neck and half on his shoulder. Mustapha felt the tiny hairs on the back of his neck extend. He reached back, seemingly catching an increasingly familiar moment, where his fingers slipped within hers, which were warm and slender.

“Stay *Fa*,” she said. “Of all days, stay today.”

“It’s not the first time there’s been a problem,” he said, wiping his forehead with the back of his hand.

“It’s not the money...it’s...you *know* I’ve never blamed you.”

“And what of Yakub? I gave a friend my word.”

"And what of this *friend*?" Khalilia questioned, tilting her head sideways.

"Yakub will understand."

Mustapha fell silent. He cupped his palms over his face and nose. His breath escaped underneath, warming his throat.

"There's work to be done today."

"Find it tomorrow."

"Some things are inescapable," he said dispassionately, unable to look at her. His fingers washed down his face as if he had just finished a prayer.

"*Fa*, what is so inescapable?" Khalilia probed. "Every day is a blessing from Allah. Forget today." He felt Khalilia slip her hand up the base of his neck, her willowy fingers washing ashore his nape, as if his curls were seaweed stirring from the waves, floating atop her fingers. Glistening. Free.

"It's so very hot," he said.

They remained, frozen, as if at a crossroads, almost arm-in-arm, brother and sister in-law, until Mustapha let go, and walked towards the door. He braced his left hand on the door frame, slightly lifting and then pulling the warped door open with his right hand. Seeing Khalilia's reflection in Khalid's picture frame, his lips neared her reflected forehead, his reflected face superimposed over Khalid's photo. He turned back towards Khalilia and Omar, wanting to acknowledge an inescapable truth. But from his mouth, he exuded only what little breath he had left, in what sounded like a sigh. He

felt beads of sweat pooling on the precipice of his lips, as if they were readying to jump.

He walked the fine line of stretching between the cool, safe, albeit uneven concrete floors of an impenetrable house, to the shoes that rested upon the steps just outside the door, unsteadily stretching as one would on rocks to cross a stream, the door still ajar. Omar's block fell to the ground, settling crooked on the floor. "God willing, everything will be okay," he said. "You will see."

It was then that he noticed a sesen tucked behind her right ear, its pink petals cupping the yellow-tipped stamens. He closed his eyes and gripped his watch, feeling neither the quartz nor the unsteady beat of his heart, but rather those fingers still washing ashore. "I always found you attractive," he said to himself, as if saying it out loud would assuage his guilt. "But you married my brother once."

Mustapha recalled his only trip to Canada, a short visit to his cousin's tiny apartment. His brother was still alive back then. For those two days, he assimilated easily into Canadian culture by eating a few Timbits and watching hockey.

What a strange game, Mustapha thought. In one instance there's an elegance, the players moving in unison, gliding on the glass-like ice; and in the next, such violence.

He watched all the players who, but a moment before, had raced around the ice, circling with such fervour as if it were the glass above the boards — and the glass alone — that was saving them from being hurtled off the ice from the centrifugal force. Now they were fighting.

“You no like?” his cousin Tariq asked, never quite looking at Mustapha, his eyes glued to the modest, second-hand, faux wood cabinet television.

Mustapha watched from his cousin’s couch in Canada, the tiny apartment filling with the excitement of the game. Tariq also watched with his daughter Sophia, or, as her best friend, a Punjabi, called her *Saunph* (an acquired taste, sweet and bold but with some bite that could put people off). This was quite fitting for the diminutive *Saunph*, who had a mischievous smile, and reckless abandon for her own wellbeing. Although she maintained her girlish status, she played with the boys who insisted on teasing her. “How are you, *little* girl?” they teased.

“I’m not a little girl,” she would respond defiantly, her pony tails wagging in solidarity.

Mustapha admired Saunph greatly. He watched the two of them, father and daughter, intently, the weight of their feet lifting the small panels of wood slightly with their excitement. When the buzzer went between periods, Tariq asked, “When drop you off?” as Saunph raced to her bedroom, and jumped on her second-hand bed’s protesting springs. She returned

wearing her pillows on her feet, mimicking the goalies on television. She stood in the doorway as if the door frame were the net.

"After the game. It's a very early flight," Mustapha said.

Tariq listened quietly; it seemed his earlier excitement was now subdued. He tilted his head to one side, examining Mustapha. Saunph had perched within the door frame, prompting Tariq to reach under the sofa and pull a hockey stick out so that they could start to play *their game*.

"So young," Tariq said. "It's a lot for a young man."

Saunph, like the game that they played during every intermission, shook her arms from side to side, her imaginary stick tapping each ball-smudged door frame, each post.

As Tariq's broken English described the play, the shots, the saves, Mustapha imagined Saunph, a girl, a Palestinian, playing on television. Perhaps Khalid — at least he was married — would one day have a child, and would also play like this when he had recuperated, Mustapha reflected.

Mustapha brushed the overflowing bank envelopes to the corner of the coffee table, a collection for Khalid's medical bills. Making room for a piece of paper, he scribbled, sketched, as he had once as a promising child, the same child who left school and helped to run the family business when he was thirteen, when his father passed away. At that time, there was only their mother, Mustapha, and his brother Khalid, the elder by one full conception. Shortly thereafter, their mother became ill, leaving the responsibilities of

managing the home and attached business to the young teenage brothers. When Khalid married Khalilia, Mustapha remained with his mother, allowing Khalid and Khalilia to make their home.

After a save, the ball got away. They stopped their game and watched the ball, drawn by its irregular roll. As if it were magnetized, the ball pulled towards Mustapha who sat on the worn, green tweed couch. The ball clicked with each rotation on the uneven floor, all of them staring at it as if it were, even though they were a world away, something else entirely. Insidiously, it rolled and released a snapping sound, as if a mechanism engaged undetonated, against his frayed, callused heel. "We can get the money there some other way," Tariq said. "Do you want to *stay*?"

Part 2 – *The Train*

Mustapha arrived at the train station. He observed how almost the entire outer wall had crumbled, as if a tank had once punctured it. Although outside's incendiary breath entered through the opening, the gap in the wall made for a far more convenient entrance to the station, a doorway that immediately faced the crowded, dusty, paper-strewn waiting hall, while the ticket booth was now directly to the right, giving Mustapha a utilitarian impression.

Inside the waiting area, a single whirring fan fluttered a red lace that was centred in its grill. Although it is probable that the lace was tied to the

fan so that patrons would know that the fan was indeed on, one could not be sure what actual purpose it served against the inescapable, mercurial heat. Mustapha looked nervously at his watch, tapping it repeatedly. *I will see you soon*, he thought.

Likely concerned with disappointing Yakub, Mustapha fidgeted and scanned the travellers. He watched them fan themselves with newspapers, or exhale in a deliberate manner as if they were an exhaust for some machine. Feeling uneasy, Mustapha's eyes wandered, looking for distractions. He watched two young men fiddle with the dial and switches as if the fan were spinning in reverse, and only expelling hot air. The two argued over the next course of action, pushing each other's uncooperative fingers away.

In Gaza, *that* Friday three years ago, Mustapha recalled how death made everyone family. Families that once promisingly branched out — cousins, brothers, sisters, sisters-in-law, and grandparents — were struck at the trunk, their branches jutting out in all directions as if a dozen mangled trees sprouted from the same spot. And so stood such a tree, leaning, tilted atop the village's hilled cemetery.

As the procession made its way from the lower village to the cemetery that morning, Mustapha held the coffin with his left hand while striking his chest with his right, chanting in unison with Yakub, a neighbour, and family

friends, all of whom held the smooth, pristine, wooden box in which Khalid lay peacefully, the phosphor burns and shrapnel unable to disturb him. Others joined in the procession as it passed through the streets. To an onlooker, the manner with which that plain, rectangular casket, its white, looped rope at either end was escorted, gave the impression that the box contained some great treasure; a covenant being watched by a royal guard to a palace, ushered into a great hall filled with jewelled goblets, rubies, and emeralds that all piled on clinking, overflowing golden coins, the corner of the coffin glinting magnanimously. In Gaza, this *hall of riches* contained nor roof, nor wall, nor sentry, but rather a single tilted Joshua tree that had lost so many of its branches.

Mustapha marched, focused, while a veiled Khalilia marched behind, the merging crowd gathering around her, pressing against each other like mortar for a great wall, growing denser and denser.

Citizens hung out from windows chanting *Astaghfirullah* (seeking forgiveness and mercy), their voices spreading like a thick haze, shrouding the procession. An IDF gunship flew overhead, dissipating the haze. Its loud blades chopped the noise into tiny shards that were stomped out by the sound of 7,860 bare feet slapping the ground. The gunship turned, hovered back past the procession, continuing on ahead until it finally revolved, turning completely around, and faced the procession, its bright cockpit glinting in the morning sun, blinding anyone who dared look at it directly.

And in the distance, it buzzed like a giant mosquito, its multiple proboscises protruding from its sides. It hovered, almost perching on the mangled tree. *It should have been me, beat Mustapha. It should have been me.*

At the train station, a restless Mustapha left his seat and opened the double wooden doors to the bathroom. An attendant, an older gentleman wearing a white suit with a black bow tie sat on a worn stool and greeted Mustapha, the top of his raven-black hair glistened when he nodded. The morning sun washed the walls with white light, while the crystalline, checkered-marble floor glowed, giving the impression that it was a secret reflection of an unseen world, an effect, which when combined with the walls' luminescence, marked the servant's entire body with a halo. A silent Mustapha pursed his lips, unsure if he should greet the attendant within such an unexpected cleanliness with God's name. Not here. Instead, he simply nodded back.

At the urinal, Mustapha peacefully watched his breath purple the chrome-like pipe above the mounted porcelain tub. First, his breath fogged the metal, covering his reflected self, and then dissipated. He moved his head strategically in the chrome's reflection, stretching his features as if this were a magical place where he could become someone else. He studied the dark yellow droplets, their colour exaggerated against the urinal's glowing, white rim, so much so that the droplets looked like tiny

costume jewellery. The attendant coughed, stirring Mustapha from his wonderment, reminding him that he was not alone. After washing and drying his hands, Mustapha walked reluctantly towards the attendant, feeling that he should say something.

“Clean. The bathroom is very clean,” he pronounced. “You should be very proud.”

The attendant simply nodded.

“How do you keep it so?” Mustapha added. “When the world is on fire.”

The attendant answered with a smile.

“How do you keep it so clean...in this place?”

“Yes, very clean.”

“Do you get any help?”

Once again, the attendant did not answer.

“Help. Does anyone help you?” Mustapha persisted.

“Yes, clean. Very clean,” the attendant replied.

The old man slowly rose from the stool, and leaned on the counter top, staggering towards Mustapha. He approached Mustapha with such proximity that Mustapha stepped back momentarily, taken aback, yet disappointed, when the old man did not hug him. He brushed dust from Mustapha’s right shoulder, then adjusted Mustapha’s collar and shoulders, pausing, as if inspecting him, memorizing what he looked like for the next time they would

meet. "Clean. Very clean. It's a question of will," he said. "Where will it perch?"

Mustapha, knowing that it was uncommon to tip and, frankly, that no one expected it, nevertheless reached into his pocket, as somehow it seemed appropriate.

He placed a coin in the palm of the servant's bony, ancient hand. His long withered fingers curled around like claws, and clutched the coin as if a fare had been paid.

As he was leaving, Mustapha paused, hearing a previously undetected sound. He looked towards the urinal, wondering if the mechanism were stuck, if the water were still running. But it was still. His eyes crept towards an unexplored wall, wondering if the steady trickle came from a fountain.

"What is beyond the wall? Is it paradise?" he asked the non-attentive servant.

On the train platform, Mustapha walked towards a space between crowds.

He stood close to a man reading a newspaper.

The headline read: AZOREAN GAZELLE ESCAPES ZOO.

He had meant to see the gazelle that was on loan but had kept putting it off.

Although he was displeased about having lost his chance to see the animal, he was secretly thankful for the gazelle, for the other animals would surely have turned on the gentle creature. *Still, to live among the tigers and the*

silk panthers, thought Mustapha. Having neared the article by crowding the gentleman, the man flipped the corner of the paper down. Mustapha quickly turned as if there were something of great interest, thus disarming the peering gentleman. Flung over a mother's shoulder, a newborn baby rested its head on her shoulder, its semi-glazed, doughy little fingers protruded from under its chin, curling and flaking like a pastry fresh from the oven, a deceiving pallor, making it unclear whether they were coming from or heading towards a hospital. Far off, the call for prayer lingered in the sky.

All around, clusters of children played. Mustapha observed three children lifting discarded car tires and, like a game of horseshoe, trying to place them in the yellow cylindrical crash barrier at the corner of the outside station wall. Nearby, three other children played in the cracked, barren soil. One of them wore shoes, bright red shoes. The shoeless children chugged their fingers along the dry cracks in the soil, following the shoed boy's path, climbing the peaks and valleys of the crusty ground. To Mustapha, it looked like they played on the scales of an alligator, on the back of its segmented, reptilian skin. Unexpectedly, like brown sugar pouring out, ants gushed from the children's play area, layering the soil, their dark brown abdomens glistening against the pale soil. The two children looked expectantly to the boy wearing the shoes.

As the train rolled in, Mustapha watched the rocks atop the wooden beams swell and depress like the keys on a piano, as if they were played by an invisible hand.

The crowded train rattled and shook its passengers, their bodies jerked from side to side with each rail seam. A mother soothed a crying baby on an otherwise quiet train. Mustapha leaned his head on the glass but it too was hot. When the train passed over a bridge, it was as if it floated across the tracks. The sound of metal rattling and grinding disappeared, allowing Mustapha to fall into a state of peace. Under the bridge, he watched the crows circle, cawing above the river's breast.

Near Jerusalem, the train began to slow prematurely as there was an indiscernible announcement. Mustapha looked at his watch, tapping it to make sure it worked. Outside the train, the reason for the unscheduled stop drew the curiosity of half of the train, although that, too, may be debatable as many quickly sighed at the inconvenience of it all, as they returned to their conversations, books, and newspapers. The train stopped, as did all the traffic outside the window. Outside, spectators lingered, watching as the robot was wheeled down the ramp from the police van, its squeaking wheels dragging down the metal planes. The robot laboured down the metal, wheezing over the pebble-strewn path around a water fountain — its silvery water like a pool of mercury — where an unattended lunch bag, the loop of

which dangled over the fountain's lip, soaked in the fountain. Mustapha looked away from the window towards the busy ruffling of the newspaper belonging to the rider across from him: AZOREAN GAZELLE ESCAPES FROM ZOO.

Although the artificial sound had penetrated everyday life long ago, the bullet snapped its fingers nonetheless, immediately returning the hypnotized to consciousness. There was no explosion, only an expensive way to aerate a backpack.

The train was silent. Mustapha's leg rested against the neighbouring passenger, and as the train started again, the sickly sweet smell of perfume wafted from beside him, urged by the open panel at the top of the window. Slowly Mustapha turned, deliberately swivelling to look at his neighbour. He stopped suddenly. The rest of the way, he looked straight ahead, not wanting to know. Yet, never once had he dared to move his warming leg from his neighbouring commuter. He thought of Khalilia. He felt her fingers running through his hair as if he were back at the house.

Looking out the window, the passing buildings looked like large planks of distressed wood that had been shoved into the ground. The sooty, dimpled bullet-laden faces of the buildings smouldered, giving the distinct impression of the early stages of a fire.

Part 3 – *The Supplanted Kiss*

Mustapha passed through the security gate. He barely noticed the security forces patting him down, questioning him on the nature of his visit, and rushing him along with the barrel of their rifles. Focusing only on his watch, he tapped it repeatedly, bypassing the queue of men at the corner, awaiting work.

Having already waited for over thirty minutes at the café, Mustapha left for the hairdresser. With his regular hairdresser busy, he sat in the hairdresser's wife's chair as she cleared the curling iron and hair brushes from the console in front of him.

"Just a trim", he instructed, vaguely motioning towards the back of his head.

"Follow the path."

"I haven't seen you in a while. I thought you left our circle," she laughed.

With the black cloth cape around his neck, covering his entire body other than his feet, Mustapha eyed the outline of his watch under the wrinkled fabric, concentrating on his fidgeting hand.

"Stay still, it will be over soon," she said.

Mustapha felt her cool breath behind him, a breath that curled around his neck, pawing, encircling his chest, and settling down his spine. Closing his eyes, he held his breath, and breathed hers. Drawing nearer, her belly

pressed against his warming back, and like the legs of commuters, chills reverberated throughout him as if they had completed a circuit, an unsaid connection between strangers that sent electricity through their bodies.

“How’s Khalilia?” she asked.

In the crowded market, Mustapha floated his flat palm just above the flipped wooden box, pausing over, and then picking up a ripe pomegranate. Holding it to his nose, his nostrils condensed, plunging deep into its aroma. He cupped the fruit snugly with his palms into his chest as if it were a hairless, newborn bird, shying from the light. Waiting to pay, a woman wearing a tichel pleaded with her impatient boy: “You don’t get a treat every time you go shopping with Mameleh,” she said, redirecting her son’s wanting hands away from the sweets with her left hand, while balancing a basket of produce with her right. As Mustapha reached the merchant to pay, the merchant mouthed some words, his lips edged along his bright, square front teeth, underneath his withered, shrunken face, his orange cheeks like onion peels. Mustapha turned to the mother behind him, insisting that she go before him. Initially hesitating in the busy marketplace, she eventually succumbed to the unexpected gesture. She nudged her child embarrassedly to say thank you. “Thank you,” he said, undoubtedly confused by his unwarranted thank you, as neither his mother nor this stranger had bought

him chocolate anyway. Walking away, she turned her head back, taking a last look at Mustapha.

Mustapha wandered into the bustling court of the marketplace, almost tripping over the zigzagging children who snaked through the feet of annoyed, muttering shoppers. In the divots and potholes, birds bathed in pools of rain from the night prior. In the distance, back towards the security checkpoint, Mustapha recognized *the acquaintance*. Although he carried a common vinyl backpack, he wore a modern, blue pin-striped suit, a kerchief protruding smartly from his shirt pocket.

Mustapha walked towards the security checkpoint, towards the acquaintance, all the while looking back at the café for his friend.

He started to recite a prayer, surah Al-Fatiya:

Bismillāhi r-ramāni r-raīm

(In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful),
Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds

The Beneficent, the Merciful.

Master of the Day of Judgement

To you we worship and to you we turn in help.

Mustapha got stuck in the middle. "Show us the straight path," he stuttered, having not recited the prayer since he was a child. Like a child stuttering on a thought, he repeated "show us the straight path."

If it were not for the constant allahu-akbar (God is great), the blank look in his eye, and the weight of his body pushing unrelentingly upon his buckling

knees, it is doubtful whether anyone would have noticed. His walk became more unsteady with every step, the weight of his breath grinded down his heart, scratching to get to the fluttering in his chest. "God is great," he said, his dry lips struggling with the words as white globules of mucous hardened in the crevices of his lips. The man nodded continuously, urging Mustapha to hurry. Mustapha's pallor dimmed, the guards turned as if they now recognized a song that was, in fact, reaching its final chorus.

The café, the guard booth, the market, and the hairdresser, all rotated slowly as would a carousel just beginning its revolutions, slowly speeding up until the white table cloths of the café, the yellow warning signs outside the guard checkpoint, and the green uniforms, the black rifles, the queue of orange, red, yellow fruit, piled purple eggplants fused together, as if one were standing in the middle of a tornado, the world only a single brush stroke comprising many colours.

Mustapha tapped his watch, paused, and then bent down on his knees, almost placing his head on the ground to remove his watch. He placed it in the shade at the foot of a telephone pole. *It's time*, he thought. *Show us the straight path.*

As he rose, off to the side, within the rustling bushes, Mustapha thought he saw something — a pair of Antelopean eyes. Bewildered, he stood up fully, looking back at the bushes. He turned his head back towards

the man. And like an apparition, Yakub appeared suddenly, walking behind the man.

Yakub immediately recognized Mustapha, his face brimmed with joy as he sped toward Mustapha. Panicking, Mustapha waved his hands as if he were shooing a bird.

Mustapha heard a snap.

It was as if Mustapha were looking out from a train. He watched the engine decouple as it shot, screaming far away:

Through a tunnel.

Down the track.

Past the Ocean.

Past the blue horizon.

The Earth. Until it was only a speck of existence in the Milky Way.

The well-dressed man looked around and saw the security forces drawing near. He mistakenly withdrew his hand from the bag.

The spell must have been cast over 150 metres. For within the radius:

Yakub, Mustapha, the man, the children, the crowd, and time itself, all stood still. It was only the birds who, but only a moment ago, were splashing in the potholes, washing away the cares of men, sensed *devilry*. Their dark, soaking bellies dripped, weighing them down. Frantically, they flapped their

drenched feathers. But for the remaining bewitched, they were etherized by the spell.

Like an ancient seductress, the flames first extended a fiery finger to Yakub's lips, the tip pausing on his philtral dimple, shushing him. And the flame, like a single curl, a single amber wisp, drew nearer, drinking fully from Yakub's lips, seducing him into nothingness.

A hundred meters away, during the same moment, another man pinched his white shirt from his chest, forming a miniature tent, fanning himself as if the damp, red speckles were a result of the heat. He held his bronzed, paralysed hand against his chest, like an island surrounded by a crimson sea. Or perhaps he was meeting someone for the first time after salaam (welcome, peace be with you), someone unseen, holding his hand against his chest for custom — perhaps this *was* the closest to the truth. He finally collapsed.

A car jolted backwards as if it were traveling quickly behind a tether and lost its grip, skimming on the waves of dust, until it flipped over, dragging its face in the fantastic sparking and splashing soil, disappearing submerged in the dazzling sparks.

And although it was born from flesh and blood, it held nor grace, nor memory, nor desire; it simply sprung forth like a *Djinn* rising from the flaming depths, flames dripping from the tips of its feathers. The flames engulfed the carts and the shops as if they were kindling, its wings

splashing, singeing distant buildings. Its outstretched flaming wings smashed into the ground, sending forth a flood of flames that engulfed the frozen citizens. And with its arms fully extended, it pulled them back in, gathering the charcoaling and sizzling objects back into its chest, blotting its own cradle, swallowing whole that which it begat — its flesh, its memory, its desire — a wave of lava-like flame feasting with its reach, the market and the guard station left eviscerated.

Mustapha lay motionless in the dirt. His blood- and dirt-encrusted lips strained with each exhale, coughing out small clouds of smoke, the image of his dear friend seared into his memory, his brother's watch in pieces.

The charred and smoking remains of the market cackled, permeating the witch's call through the settling dust. Surrounded by debris, he lay along an almost indiscernible line, a thin, razor-like bridge, where to either side rested the remains of the market. He looked at the market, unable to decipher what parts lay in the streets.

It is nor hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part belonging to a man, he thought. Perhaps many fused as one — an anatomical contradiction? Or something else entirely? Something unrecognizable? Crafted. Hidden. Symbiotic living secretly, yet revealing itself suddenly. Love? Hate? Jewish? Palestinian? What did it matter? What's in a name?

A squadron of IDF gunships chopped overhead, grinding the heat and soot further down upon Mustapha. He watched the black heels of boots and bare feet of men hitting the ground.

My sweet, sweet friend, Mustapha thought, wishing he could start again.

In all the pieces, now, they were all one.

Galloping.

Hopeless.

To oblivion.