

INJURED CITIZEN

by Rudy Spillman

The following is a fictional story, but basically, it is current today as it was yesterday. I yet save the hope that, like many others, in a near future it'll remain only in fiction.

Joshua is a young Israeli, as anyone. At 22 years of age, he has already experienced situations that many other young people from other parts of the world, may never live. He has served his homeland performing military service, as part of the bunch of *Tsanjanim* (paratroopers), risking his life repeatedly, but with the luck that not all his peers have had to be unhurt and able to hug his parents and other relatives on his return, after completing such a long period of three years of service.

Joshua shares a modest but comfortable and managed apartment owned by his parents, along with them and her younger sister, in a distinguished neighborhood of Tel Aviv. Lives days enthusiastically preparing the beginning of his studies at university, while accompanied by his girlfriend, Shalevet, both are prepared to indulge in the world of real estate in search of their first love nest, which in its beginning it's meant to be rented but they know they will love it and take care of it, as if it would be of their own.

The sun enters its daring lightning through the window of the room of Joshua. Outside, the intense green of the treetops hard to mimic the sun, making no more than bring their hardwood leaves veins abundant in chlorophyll, to caress the glass of the window, confusing its typical perfume with the yellowish glow of the rays lying on his study desk, while he, having finished showering, soaks his body with the colony chosen by his girlfriend. Looking at himself while caressing his face as if his intention would be to examine carefully every pore of his skin, in front of the mirror embedded into the inside of the right door wardrobe, notes that it will not be necessary to shave, and accordingly decides to dress up. In a little more than half an hour Shalevet will meet him in a well-known pub in the area.

Newspaper in hand and after drinking something together, they will go to visit several apartments, with the idea of accomplishing that beautiful stage in their lives. It is almost five in the afternoon. Outside, approaches the visit in advance of a cold winter day. The gloomy skies of a dark and threatening gray are alternating with the sun and its rays. But nobody knows what will happen.

As usual, Joshua is waiting for his girlfriend, and sitting inside the bar (as the cold wind is increasingly intense), in one of those typical round tables specially designed for the privacy of two. He asks the waiter to be patient. He doesn't want to order consumption yet, since he knows not how much unpunctual Shalevet will be. The place inside is crowded. The waiter withdraws nodding with a smile, making his way through the crowd, the hubbub of voices, cigarette smoke and heat from the natural human warmth.

Outside, a few meters beyond, just around the corner, stops suddenly and instead banned, a taxi-monit, which accuses its surprised arrival with the sharp rattle of its already deteriorated tires. From its inside, coming down in slow speed, as if every moment of his life would be asking the next for permission to proceed, a man, tall, corpulent, his face not letting know his age because it appears covered by thick hair and an abundant beard, which seem to continue to grow steadily. Slowly and accordingly with the whole dynamic of his pace, pays the rate to the driver, once he closed the back door of the vehicle, with American currency in such amount that is able to cover the cost of several trips more like that just made. The man begins to walk away from the taxi, leaving the driver paralyzed for a few moments, with a succulent amount of money in his hands that the passenger didn't receive in return, his sight lost in the distance, banknotes and coins of the frustrated return still in his hands, his face expressing question and hundreds of vehicle horns behind trying to return the driver to the everyday reality of an active metropolis such as Tel Aviv.

Joshua, who has not lost his sharpened sense of care and perception acquired during military service, takes alternated looks between the classified ads which are in front of his eyes, on top of the table, and the entrance door of the bar, where he is expecting to see his girlfriend coming in. He marks with his pen the adds he's interested in, while from time to time, and with increasing insistence, he puts his impatient sight in the huge double door of glass framed in painted aluminum and escorted to both sides by windows larger still, looking for the late but sure show up of Shalevet's figure, between the heads of people who are still looking where to locate.

The man moves too slowly but surely towards the entrance of the pub, where Joshua is waiting for his girlfriend. He wears a jacket that shows him more corpulent and obese than what he really is. And with the innate naturalness of an

actor, in his movements, is about to enter the place without showing a minimum indication about his intentions. Joshua marks on the page of the newspaper folded in four, an apartment located just two hundred meters of his parents. Apparently, amenities and conditions of the lease are very attractive, making it highly likely that this is the home of the fledgling couple and rises again his sight towards the front door. Then he sees him enter, covered himself with that dark and rare cloth, both hands in his pockets, hair and beard showing the sweat from his forehead despite winter temperatures. Shalevet appears just behind the strange man, hurried and worried for her exaggerated delay. Joshua is aware of the situation immediately. He is sitting at the last table located at the bottom of the hall. He stands up. The newspaper and pen fall to the ground along with the table. Extending his arm towards her, yelling: Shalevet... noooooooooooooooooo!

She almost pushes the strange man inadvertently, with the intention to reach out to her boyfriend, cutting in just a few seconds the delay. And she sees him saying "no" with his mouth and his arms. With all his body, Joshua tells her not. A few seconds later, the picture is distressing. No description is necessary. The screaming... the cries... the sound of ambulances have faded with the smoke. In a matter of hours everything will return to its place, to be as before. Excepting the material damage that this will be for a while longer the mute witness of what happened there.

In recent times, Joshua had acquired an addiction. He used to approach the small device located in the TV lounge of his messy apartment. Switched on the TV, almost compulsively, pressing the button on the remote control as if his intention was to perforate it and laid down heavily on the broken springs sofa. A continuous amount of journalistic news flooded his crushed conscience, bringing him news that he knew they were not such. At that time, 7 pm, programs exhibiting national and international news of the day, where transmitted on an almost hysterical way. But this wealth of information (or lack of it), which hurt in his temples was not enough to Joshua. He continued his obsession and didn't loose opportunity to observe and listen carefully to the news offered at other hours and different channels belonging to other countries. Until one day he realized that he was listening and seeing twenty times a day, the same thing. So he interrupted his compulsive behavior.

But after a few days, Joshua experiences something even more curious. When making the daily physiotherapy exercises in his room he begins to hear the familiar music coming from the TV lounge, of one of those programs he used to watch. Tempted by an addiction that seemed not to have passed, he runs immediately in search of the screen. He is caught by the images. He suffers and shocks with the news. And cycle starts all over again. But when the transmission is almost completed, he realizes that the device with a video cassette inside has been conveying news backward, taped earlier. But what happens at that precise moment is not in vain. So Joshua can understand that the events that were happening in the Middle East were always the same. The sad images that were printed daily in the retinas of all viewers were always the same. Just changing the places where the bombs exploded (perhaps also the quality and quantity of explosive material used) or varied the names of organizations that took responsibility for the facts, but there were always the same images with the same ambulances, the same hospitals and repeated burials. Always the same desperation felt by different names each time. Always the same politicians were saying the same things. Joshua's feeling is apocalyptic: that everything will continue until the end of our days. But it is only a feeling. He makes an attempt to mentally escape from the site of the scene, forgetting that he is an Israeli citizen and a Jew, to be able to address the issue without fanaticism and with the greatest possible objectivity. He knows that this will be very difficult to achieve. But in his opinion, it's worth the effort.

The first thing that comes to his mind is an exhausted an extensive question (so long, which suggests its intention to be forgotten even before the question itself is completed) made to himself, but that he knows he will not be able to answer: -- *What murky, immoral and hidden interests exist, and by whom (I refer to the entire international community), to keep growing for so long and in constant scourge two nations (I believe, mostly innocent), when at least part of the problem, perhaps for many not the most important, but the most urgent to resolve, this is the constant unjustified loss of innocent lives on both sides, could be understood and resolved immediately by the mind of a child, with the only condition to have good intentions?* --

He stays thinking and stunned because of his self question. Thinking that maybe, the response to it will not ever come. Exhausted because of his concerns, Joshua receives some short vacations. He decides to take a long journey trying to spend his rest on another planet. As this is impossible, but still has enough money, decides out of craziness to embark

on trains, ships, planes. He'll try all kinds of transportation, as long as exiting, even without knowing where. As a madman, he spends several days traveling to nowhere. He requests from the employees of the boxes that sell tickets, not to reveal him the locations. This attitude will bring him more than a few problems. Interrogation and investigations until everything is clear. Joshua's intentions are not subversive.

Finally he arrives to a town riding on a bicycle. He has neither the slightest idea where he has obtained it and this worries him a little. From the city he does not know even its name. He sees neither posters nor means of transport. The buildings seem very modern, except for their streets. They are all on land. He is located in a city without asphalt and without people. A few meters away, a path also leading to land brings his sight to be lost on the horizon. Near the end of the road, a child seems to stand watching. He's not sure because of the distance and decides to move towards abandoning the bicycle in the spot where he finds himself. When he realizes that the face of the child shows a strange expression of "*not needing anything.*" And he smiles. Joshua returns the smile and at the same time asks him:

-- *What is your name?* --

I do not know ... What does it matter? --

replies the boy, shrinking his shoulders and twisting his head to one side.

-- *What are you doing here?* --

Joshua speculates, trying to draw conversation to be able to address the topic he is interested in.

- *I am chatting with you* -

replied the child with innocence.

Ahhh-... Got friends? --

- *Sometimes. Not only depends on me* --

Sure, of course. And suppose you fight with your friend for many, many years. What would you do if you want to make peace? --

First, I need to know why is it that we are fighting -

- *Let us say that he has taken away something that was yours ...-*

- *Well, he has to return it to me and the problem is over* -

- *Yes, of course. But things got complicated. He is willing to give you back what belongs to you, but ... this happened many years ago and now he's afraid you will use what belongs to you against him just to hurt him. He has no longer confidence in you!* --

- *Well, if he has no confidence in me, he may continue his way and I will continue mine. We do not need to be friends.*

May all continue as it is -

Joshua is pensive. The simplicity of the arguments of the unnamed child left him stunned. He doesn't succeed to find the way to expose his dilemma to the boy. At the end, he seems to find one and feels encouraged by the idea:

- *But things have become more complicated still. You have thousands of friends now very angry because your former friend took from you what was yours. And he also has many friends who do not want him to give you back what he took from you. They think it is very dangerous to do so. And they are fighting, your friends against his friends. And every day they are hurting one another. And there are wounded on both sides. Nobody wants to give up. How would you solve this problem?* --

The child observes Joshua carefully, opens his eyes large and says, very sure of himself:

- *I never fight. I do not like fighting and I would never have friends who would fight, even to defend me* -

Joshua stays watching for a few seconds and then asks:

-- *So you would surrender to your former friend? Just like this?* --

The child... or boy (because at this stage of the conversation, Joshua was not clear whether he was one or the other), strangely looks at him, as understanding that he would not understand, and adds with slow security:

- *I would say to everyone to stop fighting. That is more important than anything else. Then we can sit to talk. We fight at the beginning because of the anger we feel at the same time. But when we calm down and start talking, that's when the issues are resolved. It always happens that way. We have never managed anything fighting; on the contrary, we harm each other. Why? If at the end everything is settled speaking. There is no other way. Sooner or later, this is the only way* -

Suddenly, the unnamed boy stops talking, stares at him with curiosity coming out of his eyes and with authentic naturalness, asks Joshua:

- Now tell me, what was it that my former friend took from me and that was mine? --

Joshua smiles and caresses the child's head while trying to explain that this is an assumption. But by placing the palm of his hand in contact with the hair of the child he perceives the same tickling energy that used to draw people's attention when he showed, long time ago, in some family parties, how his hair embraced the palm of his hand while attracted by a force that seemed to suck in with a strange way of energy, when encouraged by his parents, he made a show of it in front of a large audience and exhibited such proof. The hair of the unnamed child remains unwittingly caught up in his hand, and Joshua frightened, awakes.

After a few hours of sleep, because of the anesthesia, Joshua manages to open his eyes and with the slowness of his own state, he discovers himself in the Department of Intensive Care of the Tel Ashomer Hospital, in Tel Aviv. After a thorough visual inspection at the place and being surrounded by tubes and pipes entering and leaving his body, he gradually remembers what happened and that led him to the hospital where he is. He listens to the noise of electronic devices and sees one of the doctors coming into the room. When the door opens, the complainant murmur of desperate people coming from the corridors of the hospital reaches his ears. The surgeon closes the door of the room and comes close to him. Joshua is pleased to be informed that they only had to *amputate* his left leg. But he is trapped in an eternal sadness when he learns that the suicide attack has also *amputated* his Shalevet. His life will be changed forever. At that precise moment he remembers his friend, the unnamed child, and cannot do anything other than start crying.

*"The only war that should exist is that one we sort out with ourselves.
If we could prevail, we would avoid all others. "*

*The author apologizes for possible errors appearing in the text above
regarding that English language is not his mother tongue.*

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