

## *...and that's how it ended*

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Nick had often wondered whether or not individuals and their particular actions change history. Would nazism have triumphed in germany had hitler died at birth ? No, would have been his taut answer. He was always noting down such musings and jotting, the tales and experiences that would one day end up as the big book of answers to all historical imponderables. The more people and their doings he discovered, the more it reinforced for him that history was exactly that – *his-story* (or the distinctly fuzzier *heritage*). Nick's passion for history never left him, and just four years after his three years of study finished, he had the remarkable chance to be present at a moment that proved to him, beyond all doubt, that both single people and single events *do* irrevocably change the world's story. So if you get to go back in time to hitler's crib, swallow your repugnance and suffocate him. The moment nick was (un)fortunate enough to be present at, was an act that took a second, but after which nothing was ever the same. It was a moment after which a people paused and decidedly, definitively, chose a different road down which history would record a wholly different story from how it would have been had that event not taken place.

The place was israel. Brave, small, light, save, bloom or, touching on the religious, miracle. Or, perhaps, arab, refugee, torture, repression and occupation might better set the scene. Slovakia has about the same population, but rather fewer people have any opinion about what happens there. Is there anywhere that does not have people with the strongest opinions about that small state at the crossroads of three continents and at the centre of the *mappa mundi* ?

He heard, but did not see, the bullet.

The rally where the assassination took place was, in its own right, a seminal event. The mobilising of the silent majority, with literally a thousand buses bringing people to the country's real capital in support of the peace and in support of him. For months the streets had been occupied by the right: denouncing the oslo agreement; vilifying the democratically-elected government as illegitimate criminals and burning effigies of him, calling him arab-lover, child-killer, nazi and traitor. Traitor. This man who had fought on the front line in every single one of the country's wars, whose very life mirrored and personified the history of the state. Traitor.

The atmosphere was like a great festival. By the time he came to speak, the whole square was absolutely overflowing, all the roads around it completely full of people, the normality of traffic a long way away. The environment minister, the warm-up act, joked that he had fixed the weather for the evening, and that for his next action he was going to postpone winter. The speeches may have gone on for a while, but the climax was worth waiting for. After speaking to so many hostile crowds, after endless heckling and booing, after becoming used to having to shout just to be heard, he spoke to a supportive, even an adoring crowd and probably the largest he had ever addressed. They listened, they cheered, they encouraged. He was elated, uplifted, even renewed, we were later told by his erstwhile successor, and in better spirits than he could ever remember. It was to be his last speech, and it was a powerful one, a statement of the man at that moment. This government, he had said, which I have the privilege to head, has decided to give peace a chance. A peace which will solve most of the country's problems. I was a military man for twenty seven years. I waged war as long as there was no chance for peace. I believe there is now a chance for peace, a great chance, and

we must take advantage of it for those standing here, and for those not here - and they are many. I have always believed that that the majority of the people want peace and are ready to take a chance for peace. That the people truly want peace and oppose violence. Violence erodes the basis of our democracy. It should be condemned, expunged and isolated. It is not the way. There is democracy. There can be disputes but the outcome will be settled by democratic elections. Peace is not only in prayers; it is the desire of our people. There are enemies of the people. They are trying to attack us in order to torpedo peace. I want to tell you: we have found a partner for peace which used to be an enemy. Without partners there is no peace. Also with others, there will be an opportunity to achieve peace. This rally must broadcast to the public, to our world and to the outside world, that the people want peace, support peace. Thank you.

Most heard about the bullet on the bus waiting to go home. It was with the incredulous disbelief of its passengers that they pulled away. As the engines almost drowned out the radio, everyone was stood up, ear to the loudspeaker. As one person heard something, they passed it on: it was three bullets, dumdums, his condition was critical and then very critical; but no-one wanted to believe the obvious logic of what they heard, it was so inconceivable. An official spokesperson came with the announcement just as a large contingent of the buses got home to jerusalem. The engines were off, but everyone was sat straight in their seats listening; refusing to believe. It is with great grief and sorrow..., still it was not true, and with the greatest shock..., still it could not be, that I announce the death..., only that word, death, could finally break the unconscionable barrier, the death of the prime-minister of israel, yitzchaq rabin.

Not only was nick there for the final act, he was also there for the epilogue, nine months later. The twisting of the knife that finally killed the years of what could have been. It was almost ten o'clock when the notoriously accurate exit polls declared the result. He noticed it in the corner of his eye. It seemed they'd won – the forces of good and reason, a sane world, the peace movement, the peace agreement, the closing of the circle of peace, not just with the palestinians, but with the jordanians, the saudis, the syrians, the moon ! The face of shimon peres was shining out the tv screen, a win, it seemed, by about 20,000 votes. The secular, modern city that was but sand a century before, was party central now. Tel aviv belonged to the young, free and single, and to the left. Life was good.

The rooftop was one major festival. To english eyes it was a funny flat: a smallish lounge, a smaller bedroom and a tiny bathroom – but then there was that roof, high in the sky, half the size of a football field, and strewn now with boxes, fairy lights, old sofas, barbecues, rugs and blankets, a major sound system and a couple of hundred people dancing hard to serious reggae beats. And when black uhuru decreed dancing, nick obeyed. His good friend jack daniels joined him. Eventually he sat, joining what you realised after a while, was a circle. Nothing in this place was rushed, nothing was stressful. Everything was delight and beauty.

She had beautiful smooth fingers, hands as well. And arms. His finger slowly traced its way up to her shoulder. She smiled, and turned to blow smoke away from him and over the sea. He turned too, both of them dangling their legs over eternity. The sea, so calm, so peaceful. That's why he liked to live there. He walked alongside it every day, although rarely went in, as he was not the best of swimmers, scared perhaps by that unknown, that vastness, that no-one could swim so far, by what was below. It was awe of the deep, respect for the enormity of the sea, of blue, of creation. She kissed him. He kissed her back, and they slowly slid down to a well-placed blanket, petting, nuzzling up to each other. They slipped away without a

goodbye to a soul – and sped home in a taxi to a futon on the floor in a pink room. And warmth, and love, and peace, and beauty.

He went to bed in a dream, and woke in a nightmare. Though nick was really just a visitor to that society, an observer, he liked to think he had become pretty wrapped up with the whole peace thing. Especially being there when rabin was shot, he was more personally involved than any true observer could ever be. He was devastated when his flatmate slid back the glass door to announce that actually netanyahu had won. It was instant truth. Oh, she giggled, seeing a naked female back, sorry. The back also heard the message, and was infinitely awake. On a scale of one to ten, nick's level of devastation was ten; hers was a million. This is not to suggest she had any real interest in politics whatsoever, she didn't. Nor that, as a kibbutznik, she might be a dyed-in the wool leftie, which she wasn't. Like many young, secular israelis, her life was all about getting out of the army, going travelling in india, having fun and good sex, meeting the man of her dreams, getting rich, and then making it to the top in her career, at the same time as having a couple of kids and living a good life in a swank house, with a little skiing in switzerland. But she was devastated. Her parents had brought her up in the warm bosom of the hope of their generation, that by the time she reached her late teens, israelis would no longer have to spend the best years of their lives fighting hostile arab nations around them. It had not come to pass, but now her generation too had the same hope, and somehow the end of the cold war, the peace with egypt, and then jordan, oslo, the handshakes, the withdrawal from the palestinian cities, all seemed to nurture that febrile heralding of a new dawn that would make it so. Even rabin's death had somehow seemed to prove the inevitability of it all. They knew it wouldn't be easy; that there was a price they had to pay. In the year since that one jew killed that other one, the withdrawals had continued - even in the face of the worst bombing campaign of her young life. It was the turbulence, the chaos before redemption, before slowly, as the next generation took over on both sides, everyone laid down their weapons and beat their swords into ploughshares.

But now bibi had won. The warmth, the love, the peace, the beauty: it had all gone. Tears rolled down her cheeks. He tried to comfort her but she covered herself with the sheet and went into the bathroom, coming out dressed and made up. She kissed him on the lips. Bye, she said. The dream is over.