



Excuse All the Blood

Keith Kahn-Harris

I met him in a place of death. I saw the gun. I felt his blood.

I would not disappoint him.

Despite my floppy fringe, my neutral clothing, my adenoidal whine, I would not disappoint him.

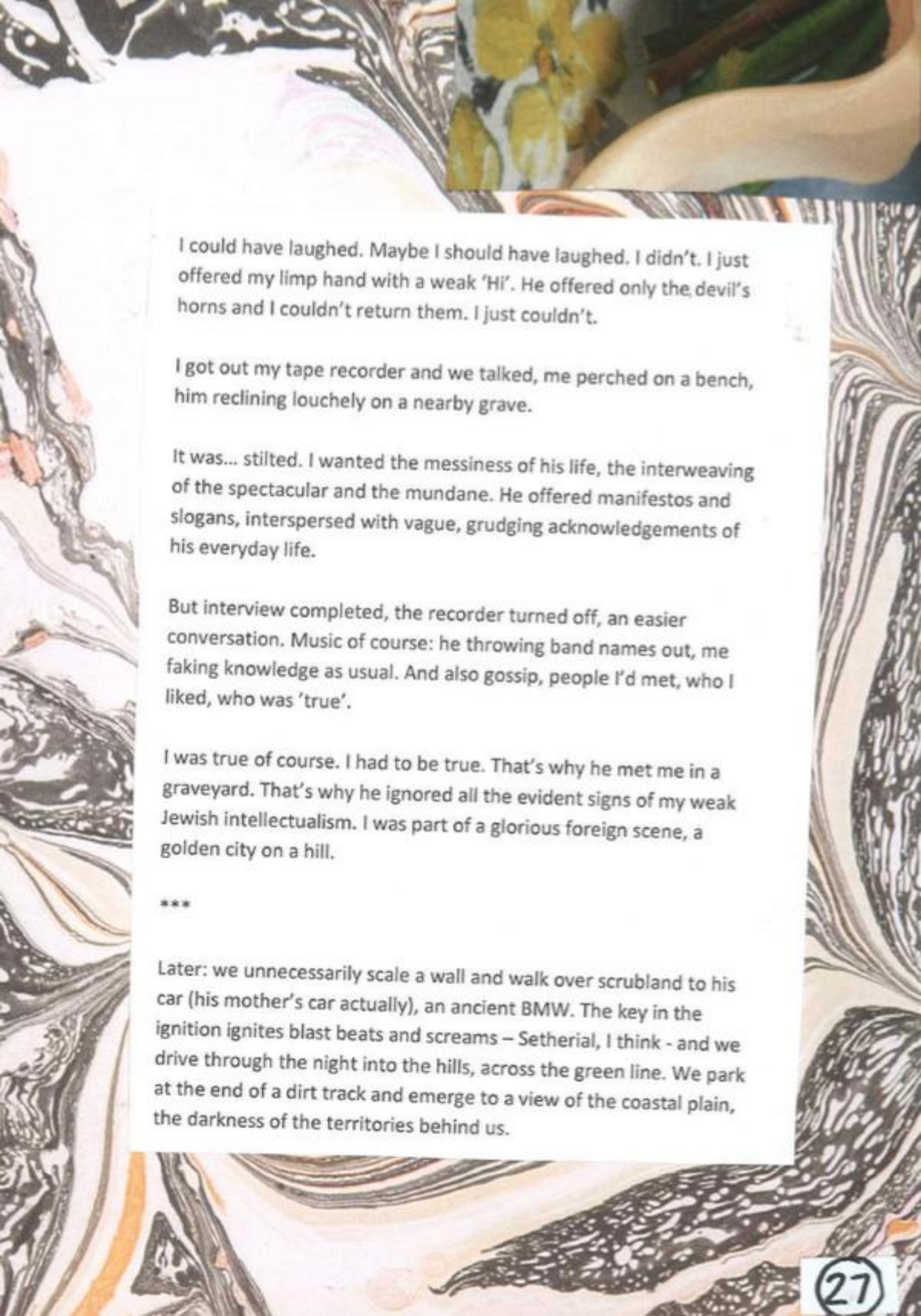
I don't remember the location of the graveyard. Night fell and I was driven through the Tel Aviv sprawl to a place of white stone. My informant dropped me off with a vague 'call me' (he didn't have a mobile and neither did I). I had been told that the wall petered out after 100 metres or so and it did; I was amidst solid gravestones with simple Hebrew inscriptions that I could just about decipher.

As promised, he was under a lonely cypress that served as the focal point for the winding paths between the stone, a silhouette highlighted against the dull light from whatever dormitory town it was that abutted the cemetery.

I approached, he turned, revealing a face painted in the stark black and white of the stones around him.

'I am Baal!' he cried.





I could have laughed. Maybe I should have laughed. I didn't. I just offered my limp hand with a weak 'Hi'. He offered only the devil's horns and I couldn't return them. I just couldn't.

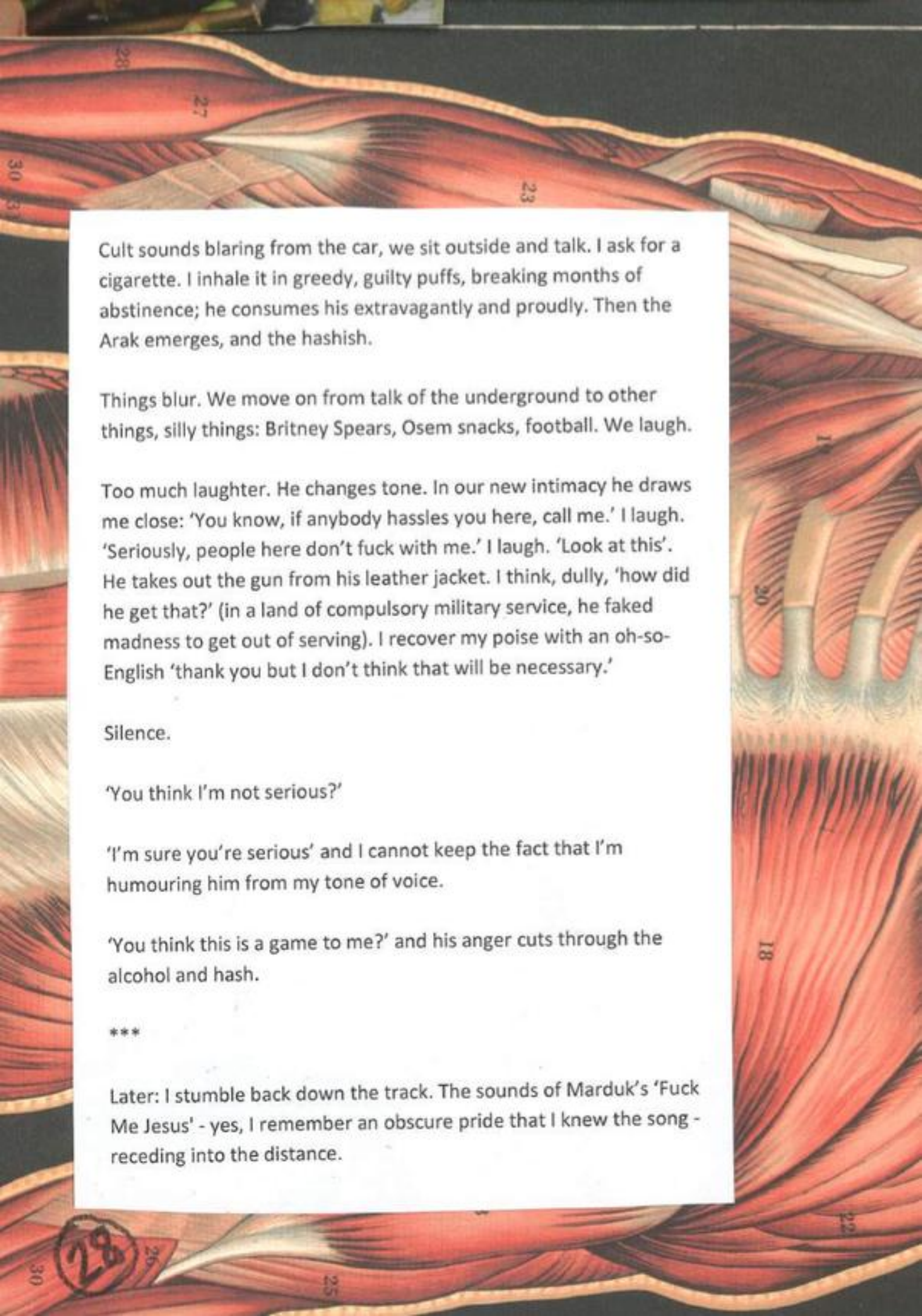
I got out my tape recorder and we talked, me perched on a bench, him reclining louchely on a nearby grave.

It was... stilted. I wanted the messiness of his life, the interweaving of the spectacular and the mundane. He offered manifestos and slogans, interspersed with vague, grudging acknowledgements of his everyday life.

But interview completed, the recorder turned off, an easier conversation. Music of course: he throwing band names out, me faking knowledge as usual. And also gossip, people I'd met, who I liked, who was 'true'.

I was true of course. I had to be true. That's why he met me in a graveyard. That's why he ignored all the evident signs of my weak Jewish intellectualism. I was part of a glorious foreign scene, a golden city on a hill.

Later: we unnecessarily scale a wall and walk over scrubland to his car (his mother's car actually), an ancient BMW. The key in the ignition ignites blast beats and screams – Setherial, I think - and we drive through the night into the hills, across the green line. We park at the end of a dirt track and emerge to a view of the coastal plain, the darkness of the territories behind us.



Cult sounds blaring from the car, we sit outside and talk. I ask for a cigarette. I inhale it in greedy, guilty puffs, breaking months of abstinence; he consumes his extravagantly and proudly. Then the Arak emerges, and the hashish.

Things blur. We move on from talk of the underground to other things, silly things: Britney Spears, Osem snacks, football. We laugh.

Too much laughter. He changes tone. In our new intimacy he draws me close: 'You know, if anybody hassles you here, call me.' I laugh. 'Seriously, people here don't fuck with me.' I laugh. 'Look at this'. He takes out the gun from his leather jacket. I think, dully, 'how did he get that?' (in a land of compulsory military service, he faked madness to get out of serving). I recover my poise with an oh-so-English 'thank you but I don't think that will be necessary.'

Silence.

'You think I'm not serious?'

'I'm sure you're serious' and I cannot keep the fact that I'm humouring him from my tone of voice.

'You think this is a game to me?' and his anger cuts through the alcohol and hash.

Later: I stumble back down the track. The sounds of Marduk's 'Fuck Me Jesus' - yes, I remember an obscure pride that I knew the song - receding into the distance.

There is no sign I was there. I collected the cigarette butts and the Arak bottle, eventually to be disposed of in a wadi a mile away. There is no need to fake anything else: the position of the body, the gun, the hand, the remains of the face, are eloquent enough.

An endless walk to Latrun. I wait in the trees, watching the bus stop until it begins to fill as dawn breaks. I join a line of soldiers and board the bus to Tel Aviv.

Then: a day of restless sleep, the breaking of the news, an awkward talk with an incredulous cop, endless ethnography as the scene lingers over the gorgeous tragedy.

Back home: juggling therapy and guilt with wading through my material, attempting to create some sort of sanitized narrative.

I read about one who came before: Per 'Dead' Ohlin, Norway, 1991. A suicide note, quoted on a hill in occupied territory by one for whom this was definitely not a game:

'Excuse all the blood'.

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