



## A HOUSE DIVIDED

“This place has a bad smell,” my small son said in Ashkenazi Hebrew as we walked through the Jaffa Gate. “Quiet,” I scolded him in Arabic. “I told you before we left the house to speak only Arabic here, you understand?”

“All right,” he replied in Hebrew, but that doesn’t count, because all the Arabs use that word, *beseder*, even when things are bad.

It was my wife’s idea. As soon as she woke up on Saturday morning she declared, supposedly as a question, “What do you say, maybe we’ll finally take the kids to the Old City?”

Usually I would be vehemently against this, arguing that it’s Shabbat, it’ll be crowded and we’ll never find a parking place. But that morning I knew I couldn’t refuse her anything. Since overexposing our private life, I have fulfilled her every request.

“Yes,” I said, lying brazenly, “I think the Old City on Saturday is a terrific idea.”

“Great,” she responded with a delicate smile of victory. “So I’ll organize the kids and you’ll turn on the washing machine?”

“Of course,” I said and went off to separate the clothes. The new washing machine just arrived this week, bought as part of the conciliation campaign I launched to try to buy my wife’s forgiveness with money. This week I also moved the dryer from the bedroom to the bathroom. That cost me NIS 1,500, to dig a canal in the wall through which to run the damned dryer sleeve. Sorry, it didn’t cost me, it cost us, because as I told her this week, “We are one body, one family, and when I say ‘I’ I mean me and you.” Another imbecilic remark that cost me half of England vs. Germany and also wrinkled hands because of washing the dishes.

“Daddy,” my son said in Hebrew as we walked through the market, “I want a Superman shirt.” He pointed to a store that sold “Free Palestine” prints alongside green T-shirts emblazoned with “IDF.”

“*Hada mush Suberman*,”<sup>1</sup> I said in a loud voice, trying to laugh and making sure that all the passersby knew we were very proud Arabs. “*Hada Suber Jew*.”<sup>2</sup> This was a T-shirt with the Superman logo, only with a black Haredi hat, side curls and the inscription “Super Jew.”

“I don’t care,” he started to scream in Hebrew in the middle of the market. “I want the Superman one!” I tried to grab his hand, calm him down and explain to him that there was no way on earth I would buy him a Super Jew T-shirt, even if he screamed in Hebrew until tomorrow. But the reaction of two Border Police who were patrolling the area made it clear to me that if I didn’t give in to the demand of the little maniac who was shouting in Hebrew, I might be suspected of being an Arab who was trying to abduct a little Jew with no accent.

“Fine, fine,” I whispered to him as one of the policemen put his finger on the trigger. “I will buy you Superman,” I said in Hebrew, swallowing the “resh” and trying to smile to prove that I was really the father of the little Jew. “Now give daddy a hug.”

“I don’t want to,” he replied and said he wanted to put on the T-shirt now.

I tried to smile all the way to Lina, the hummus place, and give the impression that this T-shirt being worn by my little boy was a type of amusing Arab joke. “It’s really nice here, isn’t it?” I almost screamed in Arabic to my wife.

“Why are you shouting?”

“What do you want me to do? Look at your son,” I whispered and shouted again to her, “It’s really funny, his T-shirt, isn’t it?”

In contrast to my son, who has emerged a complete Zionist, my daughter has come out as a freedom fighter. She sees huge flags emblazoned with the Star of David covering whole buildings in the Muslim Quarter and immediately knows they are settlers’ places. She sees

security guards at the entrances to buildings and knows instantly that they are yeshivas.

“It’s terrible,” she says, “what the government is doing to the Arabs in the Old City.”

“You’re right,” I reply and hug her with pride. “That’s what’s known as racism, my little girl.”

“Daddy,” she declares proudly in fellah Arabic, “I want you to buy me a kaffiyeh.”

“What are you talking about, a kaffiyeh? Have you gone crazy?”

“No,” she replies with determination. “I am a proud Palestinian and I want to wear a kaffiyeh.”

“Are you ready to calm down, please,” I whisper to her, looking right and left to see if any of the religious types have heard little Leila Khaled.

“Fine,” my wife tells her. “What’s the problem with buying her a kaffiyeh?” she asks me.

“What kind of kaffiyeh?” I whisper into my wife’s ear. “Do you want us to come home with a veiled woman? Besides, where did she come up with this whole political thing?”

“Why are you ashamed to buy me a kaffiyeh?” my daughter says, raising her voice and striking a defiant pose, fists on her hips. At this, a few Arab passersby stop in their tracks and lock arms, waiting for me to decide on the issue of the girl’s identity.

“I will buy you two kaffiyehs,” I announce in a loud voice, a reply that pleases the crowd.

“I don’t want two. I want one gray one, and a T-shirt with a flag of Palestine.”

“Whatever you say,” I say, and pay the delighted merchant without even bargaining.

“If you buy her a kaffiyeh and also a T-shirt, then I want something else, too,” the little Marzel shouts in Hebrew.

“Fine,” I tell him, “take whatever you want.” I let go of his hand and he enters a store. “No, please,” I beg him with tears in my eyes. “Anything but a menorah.”

<sup>1</sup>This isn’t Superman.

<sup>2</sup>It’s Super Jew.

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