



On Tuesday You Will Look and Find Me Gone

nonfiction

Cole Hamer

"I could tell you things the Egyptians did to us that would make you cry."

The Eritrean grabs the beach chair next to mine and sits. His job is to collect money, Israeli shekels, from beachgoers. He hands out receipts or sets up umbrellas or drags beach chairs through the cigarette-butted sand. Bograshov Beach sits just past the western tip of Bograshov Street in Tel-Aviv, where it plunges into the Mediterranean. If you watch the bustle of the beach from morning until late at night, you could be forgiven for thinking Bograshov was a twenty-four-hour-a-day full-service beach. The Eritrean works every day. His fanny pack is thick; work is brisk. Whenever I am at Bograshov, there he is.

"How long have you been in Israel?" I ask.

"Six years. I walked from Eritrea."

He does not wait for my questions. He glances past me to see if anyone or anything demands his attention. The French tourists roast gently; they smell of baby oil. The Russians drink hard and never whisper. And the Germans read *Der Spiegel* and frown through Jodi Picoult novels.

The Eritrean leans deep into his chair and says the Egyptians harassed him from the moment he crossed into Egypt via its border with Sudan. As the harassment grew worse, he says, the confrontations escalated from threats to blood. Fellow migrants urged him to try Israel. The Israelis, they assured him, would give Eritreans jobs.

"Egyptians are bad people," he says. "Would the Israelis be worse? No matter. He didn't have the time or luxury

to hope or wish. He didn't think Israel could be worse, and the lure of work and money to send to Eritrea was too great, so he decided to migrate, again. But, when he arrived at the Egyptian-Israeli border, he says, the Egyptians just raised their guns and shot. They opened fire on him and the other Eritreans. Unarmed, he says. No one stopped them. No one dared care.

The Eritrean jerks his hands up; his eyes dart out toward the sea and then back to a customer on a lounge chair eating watermelon with feta cheese. He lingers for a moment, considering things, maybe. Then he is silent and stares at me.

"Where is your family?" I ask.

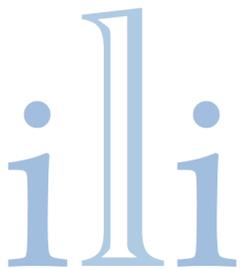
"My wife came with me, and a child," he says slowly. "My other child is in Eritrea." His voice breaks.

"Are you going to bring your child to Israel?" He digs his heels in the sand and avoids my gaze.

"The Ethiopians here hate me. They hate Eritreans. No sympathy." He points to the La Mar Restaurant where a group of young Ethiopian Israelis gather around bottles of opened beer. One laughs into her cell phone. Another with chunky nerd glasses dangles her feet off the side of a red beachside pillow. Two men just look off toward the horizon. The Eritrean shakes his head.

Another couple, loud and French, doesn't bother to unfold their umbrella and instead the man raises a hand for service.

The Eritrean doesn't move. He returns to where he might have left off and details the hate between Ethiopians and Eritreans and what he believes is the reason behind their lack of sympathy. He is professorial and succinct: Colonialism, war,



the redrawing of maps, the invention of countries and people. How interesting it is, he says, that we all ended up in Israel.

Suddenly, a Frenchman waves his fist at the neck of another Frenchman who refuses to lift his head. They flail back and forth; mad like mimes at the end of the world.

The Eritrean takes his cue and stands with his back blocking the sun. I lift my hand to block a few stray rays of light. I see him clearly now and for a while we just look at each other. Our looks are not so awkward that I can't offer a weak smile.

"Take care. I wish you the best," I say.

He turns his head toward the umbrellas and begins walking away,

"The Ethiopians, the Eritreans, you and me, what's the difference, anyway?"

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Cole Hamer's work has been staged, published, and aired on the radio in the US and Israel. She divides her time between the East Coast and Israel. <http://about.me/ColeHamer>