

quivering voice. What? As well as anger, fear. What if God could be given and taken away? What if he were not unmoving?

Sometimes a pupil remembers doing what the teacher told him – remembers having taken the sponge on its string and passed it back and forth over the letters chalked on the blackboard and wiped them out. A similar movement of a fedayee's hand, a slow gesture of farewell and obliteration, accompanied by a spoken goodbye, was so efficient that the faces of friends ordered to go down to the Jordan disappeared for ever.

But like a schoolboy seeing the words he's sure he rubbed out reappear on the blackboard, the fedayee refuses at first to recognize the face he's certain he erased, but which now belongs to a 'martyr', leaning against a tree and smiling. He may have the wit to feign delight to hide his amazement, for a man doesn't rise up again unscathed from the realms of the devil unless he's signed a pact with him. A man doesn't return from Israel. I've often noticed that gesture of farewell wiping out a face and a body. And seen the face and body appear again the next day. I don't know why, but the camp took on a mischievous air then. But Abu Kassem never came back from the Jordan. He was twenty years old.

In our conversations both Abu Omar and I avoided the slightest allusion to my brief rush of emotion.

Wherever I went in Jordan he translated smiling but accurately the theological brushes I was forced to enter into with convinced Muslims. He brought great courage and intelligence to whatever he did.

Through him I came to understand the narrow lives of the Palestinian women in the camps. Their age-old memory is as if made up of the stitches in their ancient embroidered gowns: the sum of many brief, tiny memories laid end to end, so that the women know when to buy thread, to sew on a few buttons, patch the seat of a pair of trousers or go back to the shop for some salt. How long to endure the forgetting of past sufferings, and when to add to the memories, to the salt, to the thread, to buttons, to the memory of the dead and of the fighters, to the eggs, to the tea. All that continuous life! And on top of all that, how to remain dignified, noble, when left a widow with thirteen children.

He was really grieved when he said to me one day:

'Jean, I tremble sometimes, but I've really trembled, especially in my right hand, since I heard Arafat was going to see Frangié. To think