

This Is How It'll End

Oded Na'aman

To Y. K.

One of the last stories he told me was a story about a black kid he saw during his final visit to Paris. In a bustling Metro station, he saw a little kid running and calling "father, father" to a man who was walking away. The man didn't turn around. Maybe he didn't hear the calls. The kid ran faster and called louder: "father, father." At last the kid reached the man and grabbed his pants, his leg. The man stopped, turned around, looked at the kid for a moment, and shook him off. "I'm not your father," he said and walked away.

He wanted to write the story and didn't. Maybe he couldn't. But the memory of the black kid haunted him, he told me. It is so horrible, I can't sleep, he said.

Another one of the last stories he told me was a story about an old couple who sat at a table behind us. A fat couple: he was fat, she was fat. Both had grey hair. After they had paid, they got up from their seats and carefully walked out. Then he leaned over to me and whispered:

I know them. They've been coming here for years. At first, they were so in love. Now, he sits opposite to her and thinks: How can you demand to be loved? How can you demand such a thing? So he says to her: "I understand, I understand, I understand." And she replies: "You understand nothing."

This story, too, was never written.

Another time, I read to him a line from a book he wrote. He said: this is very beautiful. Suddenly startled, he explained: I allow myself to say this only because I will never write again.

A few years earlier, he showed me his book shelves and said, jokingly: one day all this will fall on me and this is how it'll end. One of the last stories he told me was also a story about the future. He sat on the sofa, opposite his book shelves, and said: I will not read them anymore. Then he said: this is God's will, one shouldn't complain.

A month later, I was riding a bus with two heavy suitcases, filled with his books. It was only a small part of his library, most of which was sold to a peddler in the market, together with the rest of the apartment's contents. When I came by to pick up the books, the apartment was almost vacant and dust hovered in the void. I called him on the phone to ask how he was doing and how the new place was. It's not a place, it's shit, he said, shit. He said: I want to go back to Israel but it might take a few days, or months. He was moved one town over, to Ramat-Gan.

I'm reading his books. I'm sitting on my sofa at home and looking at his books on my shelves.

I went to visit him in his new place of residence, at the ward. When I got up to leave he wanted to come with me and I said it was impossible. He escorted me down the hall. The glass door closed shut, he waved at me and I walked away.