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Opening Extract from...

Miral

Written by Rula Jebreal

Translated by John Cullen

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Míral

· RULA JEBREAL ·

Translated by
JOHN CULLEN



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For Julian

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And to all the Israelis and Palestinians
who still believe peace is possible

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Miral

PART ONE

Hind

1

At dawn on September 13, 1994, a chill ran through the Arab Quarter of East Jerusalem, as word of Hind Husseini's death spread from house to house even before Radio Jerusalem broadcast the news. That morning, the rattling sounds that usually accompanied preparations in the souk moved from the narrow lanes and alleyways of the Old City to the edge of Saladin Street, along which the funeral procession would pass. Many shopkeepers kept their rolling shutters down and stood with folded arms in front of their places of business. The haggling and bargaining over goods had stopped as soon as word spread that the coffin was leaving Dar El-Tifel orphanage, the place, nestled at the foot of the Mount of Olives and facing the Old City, to which Hind had dedicated her life and that, ever since its founding in 1948, had become a symbol of hope for Palestine's present and future.

In the Arab Quarter, Palestinian flags hung from the windows of the houses, and those residents who had not gone down into the street stood on balconies, throwing handfuls of salt, rice, or flowers onto the coffin as it passed by. Everyone came out to honor a woman who had lived with courage and humility. Men had tears in

their eyes. A feeling of deep dismay settled over Jerusalem, a great sense of loss, as if one of its gates had suddenly been shut forever.

Hind Husseini was born in the Holy City of Jerusalem in 1916, when it was still part of the Ottoman Empire. She spent the first two years of her life in Istanbul, where her father was a judge. Her father died a few months before the fall of the empire, on the tail end of its defeat in World War I. Her mother brought the family back to Jerusalem. At the time, Palestine was making the transition from Turkish rule to its new status under the British Mandate, which lasted until the birth of the State of Israel in 1948.

Hind, her mother, and her five brothers moved into a house in the Armenian Quarter that had been in the possession of the Husseini family for centuries. Her mother and father had lived in the spacious five-bedroom dwelling after they were married, and its living room was still furnished with the same colored rugs and pillows that Hind's mother had embroidered in her neighboring village. In the center of the room, a hookah sat on a typical Arab table, a wide silver tray mounted on dark wooden legs.

Upon their return to Jerusalem, Hind's mother took charge of the farmlands and livestock she had inherited from her husband and his family, in the outlying district of Sheikh Jarrah. Early each morning, she would make her way to the farms to oversee the various workers. Her companion on those daily excursions was her oldest son, Kemal, whom she wished to teach the family businesses so she could turn them over to him one day. Early in the afternoon, mother and son would return to the Old City, stopping along the way at the family's principal residence, Hind's grandfather's house, located a short distance outside the city walls. Hind would be playing there

with her brothers and cousins, and they would all remain there until dusk, when they would return home. When relatives asked Hind's mother why they made this daily migration, she would unhesitatingly reply, "My husband knew that if anything were to happen to him, we would go back to our house in Jerusalem, so his spirit would know where to find us."

Hind's mother loved that man for most of her life, having married him at the age of fourteen, in accordance with a matrimonial agreement arranged by their families. Since she was of noble birth and her future husband belonged to a clan whose members occupied the most prominent civil and religious posts in the city—from governor to mayor to mufti—the wedding ceremony turned out to be quite a spectacle. The bride arrived on a white horse, a purebred Arabian, followed by her entire family. She brought as dowry three tracts of land and two houses, while the groom, in keeping with an ancient Arab custom, gave her a copper chest lined with red velvet overflowing with gold jewelry especially fashioned for the occasion: bracelets, necklaces, earrings, and rings. Despite their beauty, Hind's mother rarely wore her gold ornaments, for she considered displays of wealth vulgar. The celebration took place in the house of the groom's family, where the women had prepared grilled lamb spiced with cardamom and cinnamon; basmati rice with pine nuts and raisins; squash, carrots, and leeks sautéed with onions and nutmeg; yogurt; and various trays filled with mixed fruits. The dancing began toward evening and didn't end until long past midnight, when the parents of the bride and groom accompanied them to their new home in the Armenian Quarter. The young couple's relatives waited outside the house until the hills of Jerusalem turned pale pink with the first light of dawn. Only then did the groom

reappear to present proof that his marriage had been consummated and his bride was truely a virgin.

A certain tranquility still reigned in the Jerusalem in which Hind took her first steps. Even though she was a Muslim, as a child she spent every Christmas Eve at the American Colony Hotel, which was once the palace of a Turkish pasha. Every year its owner, Bertha Spafford, a rich and eccentric American, threw a Christmas party in the hotel for the children of the quarter, who were served a turkey dinner with bread and raisin stuffing, followed by dessert and the distribution of presents. In a corner of the main lobby stood a Christmas tree, a gift from Hind's mother, who with the help of her sons had dug it up from her property. At the end of the festivities, the children would follow Bertha outside to witness the transplanting of the tree to the hotel grounds, "because," as Bertha would tell her young guests, "if we let the tree die, then the Christmas party will have served no useful purpose." Following dinner it was customary to sing Christmas carols in Arabic, after which the Christians would attend midnight Mass in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Bertha and Hind's mother eventually established a small infirmary for the farmers who worked the Husseini lands. One day when a newborn was abandoned at the infirmary door, the two women, helped by a volunteer physician, immediately took the baby in and cared for it until they found a farmer and his family who were willing to adopt it.

Hind and her brothers received an excellent education. Their mother expected them to spend at least a couple of hours each day reading. Their books of choice included some novels in English, acquired with Bertha's help. Hind's mother was particularly insistent

on her daughter's instruction, because, as she said, education elevated a woman's social status. Hind was sent to Women's College in Jerusalem, while her brothers, like young men from other important Palestinian families—Husseinis, Nashashibis, Dijanis—completed their studies at prestigious universities in Damascus or Cairo.

Hind was privileged to spend her adolescence in one of the most fascinating cities in the world. Although some signs of the disasters to come were already evident, in those days Jerusalem was still a place where children could grow up in peace. Hind's mother would have liked to marry her off in grand style to one of her cousins, but Hind was intent on continuing her studies in Damascus. The Arab revolt against the British Mandate in 1936 interrupted both the mother's projects and the daughter's dreams.

To the two women who washed the body before it was wrapped in a shroud—so that the deceased would stand before God perfectly pure, as prescribed in the Koran—the features of Hind's face seemed as serene as when she was alive, unblemished by the excruciating agony that had afflicted her in her final hours.

Hind had awakened the previous morning drenched in sweat, and although she tried to hide the pain her illness was causing her, her daughter Miriam decided she should go to the Hadassah Hospital, where the physicians who had her in their care were based. In the end, Hind allowed herself to be persuaded, but she asked first to pass by Dar El-Tifel. She wanted a last look at the grounds of her beloved school.

At that time of year, the garden was no longer graced by the marvelous blossoms that spread their strong perfume to the surrounding lanes and courtyards at the beginning of summer. That

fragrance accompanied Hind's happiest memories, evoking the flowering season, when sunlight pours down on the hills of Jerusalem so intensely that the houses blend with the sky.

Hind remembered how bare the spot had been before the school was established, without the rose garden, the olive trees, the lemon trees, the palms, the jasmine, the pomegranates, the grapefruit, the magnolia, the fig trees, the little grapevine, the cinnamon and henna trees, without the mint, the sage, and the wild rosemary. And without the little fountain she had built in the center of the courtyard, exactly like the one her family had when they lived in the Armenian Quarter. Her thoughts dwelled on the memory of that place as it once was—before the fragrances, the bright colors, and the laughter of little girls as they chased a ball on the playground, safe from the tragedies that were taking place outside its walls.

Miriam, the school's vice-principal, a robust woman of imposing stature—broad shouldered and nearly six feet tall—raised Hind to a sitting position in the backseat of the car. Consumed by her disease, Hind had grown extremely thin, and her voice was faint. "When you came to Dar El-Tifel, I was the one who took you in my arms," Hind said, her eyes smiling as they always did. At the age of one and a half, Miriam had lost both her parents: her father, a fedayee, had fallen in battle, while her mother had been killed in an ambush. The imam of the mosque in the child's village had brought her to the school. She was undernourished and had pneumonia. Hind received her and put her in the care of the school physician, her cousin Amir. Miriam grew up inside the walls of Dar El-Tifel and decided to remain there even after she graduated. Her affection for Hind was that of a daughter for her mother, and during the long months of Hind's illness Miriam looked after Hind with loving care, pushing her in her wheelchair around the school

grounds for several hours each day and, when needed, lifting her up in her own strong arms. She washed her, too.

As the automobile passed the school gate, Miriam watched Hind turn to cast a final glance at the Mount of Olives, which was vibrant with silvery reflections as its trees shook in the first fall breezes.

Hind saw her Jerusalem with different eyes now, saw it rooted in soil drenched with innocent blood, and under that soil were its tunnels dug under synagogues, crypts, and secret passages. Simultaneously, however, Jerusalem reached upward, its minarets and steeples jutting into the sky. She thought that contradiction mirrored the history of this vexed land, of the tragic destiny that had made it at once the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of hell. As the car left the Old City behind, she was dazzled for an instant by the light reflecting off the houses built of gleaming white stone, as if to signify hope and peace, despite everything, despite everybody.

Hind thought back to the most difficult moments of her life, which were associated with those that were most tragic for her people: the massacre at Deir Yassin, Black September in Jordan, and then the outbreak of the war in Lebanon. She thought of the Sabra and Shatila massacres. Each of those moments had signaled another defeat, the reenactment of an unchanging script in which the Palestinian people invariably ended up losing.

Gazing out the car window, Hind landed on a thought that was never very far from her mind: the Palestinians of Jerusalem were obliged to fight on two fronts, one internal and one external—mostly against themselves, first, to avoid falling into an absurd spiral of violence that would surely lead to their defeat; and then against unscrupulous political forces ready to serve up their land on a silver platter, like an exchangeable commodity.

She thought about the First Intifada, about all her efforts to keep Dar El-Tifel's schoolgirls away from the demonstrations, and about how she had succeeded in saving a few lives. Many well-to-do Palestinians had left the country, hoping to make new lives somewhere else; Hind, on the other hand, had decided to stay and to do something for her people. More than a conscious decision, it had been her destiny, which she fulfilled without wavering. In her vocabulary, the word *privilege* had a unique significance: it meant the condition of being able to help others. Although she never married, she was, as she often laughingly told her girls, "the woman with the most daughters in all Jerusalem." Indeed in 1948, not long after her thirtieth birthday, when Hind was an elegant open-minded young woman, a poet had compared her to Jerusalem, "the bride of the world." As the car pulled up in front of the hospital, she wondered, "How will they manage without me?"

After completing her studies, Hind taught in the Muslim Girls' School in Jerusalem. Later she founded, with several colleagues, an organization dedicated to combating illiteracy in her country. As one of the group's most active members, she had traveled the length and breadth of Palestine, promoting the opening of new schools in even the most remote villages. She would drive to refugee camps in a large school bus and come back with children whose mothers, poor women unable to provide their offspring with an education, were more than happy to entrust them to her. At the time, Hind was convinced that the salvation of the Palestinian people would depend on the cultural liberation of its youth. The organization she helped to establish put out a magazine whose goal was to make people aware of the conditions facing the most disadvantaged children.

After the end of World War II, just when the world seemed to have found peace again, Palestine began its descent into a nightmare. It was as if questions unresolved elsewhere had suddenly exploded in its midst, like a fatal firestorm. This time the walls of the Old City, an ancient symbol of security, were unable to defend its inhabitants, because the war was already inside.

All her life, Hind had nourished the conviction that religion was not the sole or even the main cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which was mostly based, as she saw it, on politics. But her voice was like a whisper compared to the incessant din of weapons spreading death and pain in its name.

The Arab bourgeoisie left the city en masse. Many families planned to come back when the fighting was over, and Hind's colleagues assured her that they would resume working together very soon. But most of them would never return to Jerusalem; they would go on with their lives in Amman, Damascus, or Cairo. At the same time, as the Israeli army proceeded with its conquest, the Old City gradually filled up with evacuees from the villages, who were left with no recourse but to flock to the city and try somehow to survive there.

Hind was the only member of her organization who decided to remain in Jerusalem. As her sole precaution, she abandoned her house in the Armenian Quarter for a few months because the southwestern part of the Old City was too exposed to Israeli fire.

Meanwhile, all the men went to the war, and the women to work. Without schools to attend or adults to watch over them, children roamed the streets. This was when Hind decided to open a small kindergarten in the heart of the Old City. It consisted of two simply furnished rooms, one with a dozen beds and the other with

several chairs and little tables. Not long afterward, when the fighting spread to the city center and prevented the children from reaching Hind's school, she was forced to close it down.

2

On April 9, 1948, as soon as a lull in the fighting allowed her to do so, Hind Husseini returned to Jerusalem, where the governor had invited her to a meeting about the refugee emergency. The young woman entered the Old City through Herod's Gate and walked the narrow streets, observing the sparsely scattered stalls that were all that was left of the lively confusion of the souk, which once teemed with vegetables and where the intense fragrances of mint, cumin, and cardamom had mingled with extravagant displays of fruit.

A month before the establishment of the State of Israel, an atmosphere of gloom permeated the Old City. In the Jewish neighborhoods, greetings were muted, and passersbys avoided one another's gaze. Uneasiness was even more palpable in the Arab Quarter, where the muezzin's call sounded more like a protracted lament than the usual joyous invitation to prayer.

Approaching the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Hind came across a ragtag group of children. There were about fifty of them: some sitting on the edge of the sidewalk, leaning against one another, while others stood motionless on the side of the street, as if waiting for somebody. As Hind drew near, she noticed that the

smallest children were barefoot. Many of them were weeping and almost all had mud-spattered cheeks and dusty, matted hair. She immediately sought an explanation from the oldest girl, who looked to be about twelve and was wearing torn trousers and a shirt with ripped sleeves.

"Where are your parents?" Hind asked. "And what are you all doing out here in the middle of the street?"

"This is where they left us," replied the girl, barely holding back her tears.

Hind sat down beside her. "What's your name?"

"Zeina," the child replied between sobs.

Zeina told Hind that she had heard gunfire all night long in her village, Deir Yassin, and that she had seen houses, including her own, catch fire. She had looked for her parents, crying out to them, but since all she heard was gunfire, she hid herself. When morning came, some armed men suddenly snatched her from her hiding place and brought her to the village square. There she found other children, but nobody from her class at school. She and the other children were herded into a truck, and then the armed men dumped them, without a word, near the gate to the Old City.

"Wait for me here, Zeina," Hind said reassuringly, stroking the girl's hair where it was stuck to her forehead. "I have to speak to someone, and then I'll come right back."

3

Anwar al-Khatib, the governor of Jerusalem, had never met Hind Husseini, but he was well aware of her commitment to helping the country's disadvantaged children. As soon as he saw her enter the meeting room, he recognized the characteristic determination of the Husseinis.

Hind immediately asked to speak. "Excuse me, but before you call the assembly to order, I wanted to tell you about a group of children, fifty or so, that I met just a few meters from here. They're survivors of a massacre."

"At Deir Yassin," the mutasarrif replied, having learned of the incident just an hour before.

"They're dirty, hungry, and scared," Hind said. "There's no time to waste. We must help them immediately." She repeated the story she had heard from Zeina.

Seated behind a heavy wooden desk cluttered with yellowing papers, the governor stroked his beard as he listened to Hind. His eyes remained fixed on an engraving that portrayed Jerusalem at the end of the nineteenth century, as if to fathom just when and where it had begun, the conflict that was now bringing to light all the rottenness that once lay dormant in the belly of the city.

When Hind finished speaking, he explained to her that he had to consider the problem in its entirety, and that for the moment he would be unable to address the needs of those particular children. "We have so many refugees that we don't know how to help them all."

Hind rose to her feet and headed for the door. Turning to the governor, she sought out his eyes and said in a calm but firm voice, "I understand. Go on with your meeting. For my part, I'm going to see what I can do for them."

Anwar al-Khatib couldn't help but be impressed by the young woman's intransigence. She was determined to help those orphans at any cost.

4

When Hind returned to the children, they were still in the street, right where she had left them, despite evidence that meanwhile a gunfight had riddled the plaster of a nearby house. They stood there frozen, petrified by the incident. Hind took the smallest child by the hand and said to the others: "Come with me, children, all of you. I'm going to take you home."

To reach Hind's house, the odd procession had to cross from one end of the Old City to the other. Anyone who saw them pass was struck by the contrast between that little army of barefoot, disheveled children and the elegant young woman who led them. In the meantime, news of the massacre at Deir Yassin—carried out by the Irgun militia with the hidden consent of the Haganah, the regular Israeli army—had made the rounds of the city, rebounding from shop to shop, from one vendor's stall to the next, before the newspapers had time to print it.

It didn't take long for people to make the connection between the news of the massacre and the fifty-five traumatized children, the older ones holding the younger ones by the hand, that odd parade marching through the streets of Jerusalem behind Hind Husseini.

. . .

Hind's house was a big villa of white stone, shaded by a large, luxurious garden. Her mother and two housemaids sadly watched as the group of children arrived and were momentarily rendered speechless when Hind asked them to help wash and feed her new charges.

When her mother and the maids started asking questions, Hind—who at that moment had only the children on her mind—replied curtly that they were the survivors of Deir Yassin. "I'll put them up in the kindergarten for the time being," she added, before proceeding to escort the smallest children to the bathroom.

Dramatic situations tend to generate conflicting emotions. On the one hand, there's an increased sense of solidarity and mutual support, but at the same time an insidious, almost instinctive feeling of envy is directed toward those who appear more fortunate. In the days to come, people with wicked tongues would accuse Hind of stinginess, of not spending enough of her money to help others. She responded to such taunts by declaring that her entire cash reserve amounted to 128 Palestinian dinars, and that she intended to use it all to help the surviving children.

Others, however, instantly saw the importance of what she was doing. Among them was Basima Faris, the principal of a nearby school, who came one day of her own accord to offer help in caring for the children. Basima was a no-nonsense, upright woman unafraid to look men in the eye and ask for what the children needed. With this ally at her side, Hind went every day to the city's merchants and shopkeepers, who were almost always happy to donate food, clothing, and blankets. Even so, Hind knew that eventually the money she had set aside would not guarantee her orphans

even a single meal a day. She decided to visit the governor's palace again, this time with Basima.

Anwar al-Khatib was in the meeting room with some local merchants. The two women stood just inside the door and waited for the gathering to finish. The governor had not noticed them and was speaking to his guests. "If you want me to grant you a business permit," he said, "you must all promise to send a sack of potatoes, a sack of rice, and a sack of sugar to Hind Husseini's school."

The oldest of the merchants answered without hesitation: "I've heard about this courageous woman. I'll send the items you've named to the orphanage today. And I'll throw in some fruits and vegetables, too." The other businessmen nodded in agreement.

At this point, the governor rose and noticed the two women. Hind's face clearly showed surprise, for up until that moment she had considered the governor an obstacle. Her eyes revealed that she was intensely moved. Al-Khatib came over, smiling affably, and inquired as to what he could do for them.

"I have nothing to ask for," Hind replied, returning his smile. "We've already obtained what we wanted. You fulfilled our request even before you heard it. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts, you and all the merchants."

In the succeeding weeks, the fighting in Jerusalem intensified. The Israelis made repeated efforts to penetrate the Arab Quarter of the Old City, but its imposing sixteenth-century walls, with their massive gates, served to defend it for a while. Jerusalem was to become a city divided in two: East Jerusalem under the control of the Arabs and West Jerusalem under the control of the Israelis.

One morning Hind arrived at the kindergarten to find all the

children in the courtyard, huddled in a circle, the littlest ones weeping desperately. "What's the matter?" she asked. "Why are you crying?"

Zeina stepped forward and reported that they had been woken up by gunfire during the night, and since it went on and on, they assumed the soldiers were going to destroy everything, as had happened in their village. They decided the best thing to do was to assemble in the courtyard, ready for the soldiers to come and take them.

That day Hind decided that she would always sleep under the same roof as the children. She also realized that the place was too dangerous, and when the ceasefire finally came, she made preparations to transfer the orphanage to her grandfather's house in Sheikh Jarrah. Explosions had damaged the house, but it had to be repaired in any case, and now a second building would be constructed, surrounding the main residence. The old residence would become the dormitory, while the new building would house the school.

Hind applied once again to the magnanimous governor, this time during a meeting at which he was hosting some of the most prominent members of the city's upper middle class. Wasting no time in beating around the bush, the young woman declared to the assembly, "I know that many of you have been financing the resistance." The governor rolled his eyes and started to reply, but Hind stopped him with a gesture and continued: "I'm only asking that you also finance the project of establishing a home where orphaned children can be brought up. That's a form of resistance, too; in fact, it's the best resistance. As you well know, they are the future generation, but for now, they need us. We cannot abandon them. When they become adults, we shall need them, but not if they're

weak and hungry. We'll need tenacious, strong, educated people. They will be the ones to build our future Palestine."

Once again, the governor complied with her wishes. As it turned out, the funds he allocated were insufficient, but Hind found that she could count on the financial support of many Palestinians, including those from families that were less well off.

5

In September 1948, Dar El-Tifel, the "Children's Home," was born. In the turbulent months following its birth, this institution—a combination of school and orphanage—grew indispensable, a fact noticed by many, including the governor. If he had first viewed Hind's project with a bit of skepticism, he was now receiving, day by day, a growing number of requests from all over the country to help children who had been orphaned or inadvertently abandoned by their parents during the precipitous flights from the villages.

One afternoon, Hind received a visit from al-Khatib. Sipping mint tea on the patio of the school, he confided that the situation in the rest of the country was more serious than anyone in the city could imagine. As he wearily passed a hand over his white head, Hind saw that this elderly man, who in the course of his life had witnessed a long series of tragedies, seemed to be buckling under the weight of the terrible recent months. "I fear the worst is yet to come," he confessed.

Strolling with Hind in the unkempt garden that would become the school's flourishing park, the governor spoke with absolute frankness about the confidential information he had received that very morning concerning Deir Yassin. In evident anguish, making

long pauses, he described the account written by the envoy from the International Committee of the Red Cross. Although the children's story had given some idea of the brutality of the attack, nothing had prepared him for what he read in that report. In a quivering voice, without looking Hind in the eye, al-Khatib told her that his shock had turned into a suffocating mixture of anger and sorrow as he read how ruthlessly and systematically the slaughter had been carried out.

"The report," he said, his voice choked with tears, "speaks of 254 people massacred in cold blood. Not only young men, but old men, and women and children who were shot in the back as they tried to run away. Houses were burned and women raped. Forty men were seized, stripped naked, and brought to West Jerusalem. They paraded them through the streets, and then executed them in front of a crowd. How will those fifty-five children forget what they saw?"

Hind remembered the children's eyes when she found them near the souk. She recalled their terrified looks, their dirty hands, their shaky legs. Now she watched some of them playing outside the tents that served as a makeshift home until the dormitory was finished. She saw others sitting alone, here and there, and knew decisively that she must do something to give them a chance. They would never forget—she was sure of that—but she would do all she could to give them a better future.

Meanwhile, the governor had resumed talking, walking slowly as he did so, gazing from time to time toward the Old City: "But what worries me most of all is that the Haganah didn't participate directly in the massacre. They left it to extremist groups like the Irgun and the Stern Gang. I'm afraid they may be using Deir Yassin as a threat to persuade us to abandon our villages. Whole areas of Galilee are being depopulated. Ancient communities are breaking

up under the blows of the Haganah's propaganda. So it's entirely in their interest to publicize the brutality of what happened." Al-Khatib paused and turned to look Hind in the eyes before continuing: "Our people are scattering. We're risking a diaspora. I fear that cruel acts of revenge will mark the beginning of a fatal spiral, like what happened with the Mount Scopus attack." The governor pronounced the last words almost in a whisper, as if he himself were frightened to hear them.

The Mount Scopus attack to which the governor referred was the Palestinian retaliation for Deir Yassin. It took place on April 13, 1948, four days after the massacre, when a convoy of two buses and two Israeli military vehicles was ambushed on the road to Jerusalem. The buses, containing many civilians, were set on fire. The British eventually arrived on the scene, after a six-hour gunfight that left more than seventy Jews dead.

Hind, who had remained silent during his speech, sank exhausted onto an old wooden bench.

Over the course of the following years, the governor's words proved prophetic. News of the slaughter at Deir Yassin did indeed rebound from village to village, generating a mass exodus of Palestinians to the neighboring Arab states, particularly Lebanon and Jordan. When the eastern part of Jerusalem was ceded to Jordanian control, Hind considered the move a mistake, believing a regime of Palestinian self-government to be a far more advisable solution. However, she decided to involve herself as little as possible in political matters.

Having recently completed the rebuilding of the old white-stone villa, Hind decided to accompany her mother on the hajj, the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca.

When she reached her journey's goal, she knelt before the black stone, the holiest spot for every Muslim, touched her forehead to the earth, and thanked God for all the progress she had made in her work and for all the support she had received. "Help me, help me, help me," she said, repeating the prayer three times in accordance with Arab custom. "Help me build a home for these children." At that moment, she decided she would never marry.