

## LARGE-SIZE MEN'S SHOES

Father, mother, a son and a daughter. He is younger than her by a year and eight months. Before she was born, her father was a Marxist. Her father didn't even visit her mother in the first two days. She was a girl.

On the third day Hatem arrived to the hospital and found a brownish daughter, like him. She didn't stop crying. He became religious.

Second time. On his way back from the hospital, he moaned.

"You have a son," the taxi driver insisted.

Right, mumbled Hatem.

Hatem, if you won't come to the wedding I won't talk to you for the rest of my life.

I can't Soaad, I'm religious!

I don't care, you will come to Manal's wedding. Determinedly.

He went. They pushed him to dance with the dancers, and from his own will he planted money between their breasts.

He didn't know how to dance, but when he sees dancers in the television he growls he'll watch them.

Baba you are not allowed to see dancers, you are religious!

It's art my dear, only art.

And the town didn't fall down. The sheikh went to the wedding, danced with the dancers, and planted money between their breasts.

They put an embargo on him for a period of time. Nobody came to hear his preachings on Thursday evenings.

They forced her to wear a little wedding dress. She was ashamed of him. She had milk teeth at that time.

She had an aged uncle, Raad was his name, Abo Aisa. Grandfather she used to call him. They lived at his place until the owner of their house evacuated their home. Hatem didn't feel happy to force his friend to leave the house. Because he didn't have any other place to go to, as opposed to Hatem who could live at his brother's apartment and preserve his, and his family's, honor.

Numbers she knew how to read. But didn't know how to count. The watch store next to her grandfather's house was her first shop window. But the watches that Abo Aisa bought her didn't last more than a few days.

Once, she watched the Jordanian channel, the only one that broadcast Arabic cartoons at that time. A choir of girls sang a song for the king. She looked for a girl similar to her, selected the ugliest among them and pointed: me.

"Make me a cup of coffee, and let it be boiled well," the grandfather used to ask. Her first time was at the age of nine. He escorted her to the kitchen and showed her how he likes to have his black coffee.

Two daughters and three sons he had. Two of them were in jail. One for acting against the civil guard, the other for drug dealing. The third was just a loafer. One widow, and one married to a sculptor, who was employed by her sister's husband, *Allah yerhamo*.

Early afternoon. Friday. "Sweetie, wash the cooking pots, grandmother is an old lady, and you are a young girl," the sculptor's wife pointed out.

At that time she had protruding teeth, after a terrible fall from the widow. "How can I show my face in the street?" she shouted facing the mirror. When Hatem arrived they told him the only thing his daughter said was, how could she show her face in the street.

"With God's will.... I promise.. on Tuesday the weather will be wonderful," the loafer promised.

You promise all the time but you never take us?!

No, no, this time I'll take you.

Tuesday arrived. The sea was cold.

She washed the dishes, the floor, and tidied the rooms. What do you think about taking a bath together, she asked her brother. Yes, why not. They went in. What are you doing there, Abo Aisa shouted. Get out now and don't you dare do it again. Brothers and sisters don't bathe together.

They put on their clothes and left with falling and misunderstood faces.

They understood.

So, did you move to your new house?

No, not yet.

What's missing?

Hmm.. I forgot what it's called.. The thing outside the windows.

What?

Ashamed the voice wanted to die.

Shutters, said the cutest boy in class.

That's right. Shutters.

He heard her.

Miss, may I go have a drink? Abed asked.

hmmm

(the faucet was in the classroom)

She asked permission from the teacher and kissed the fairy. He was here.

Abed didn't love her. He was the most popular boy in class.

Five boys sat at the last table of the first row, naming the prettiest girls in class.

Nivin, Samar, Maha, Nagwan and..

What about Fidaa? asked Sami.

Fidaa! No way, said Mohamad and pointed to a fifth name.

Fidaa loved only Abed. Abed loved many but her.

Why?

She didn't ask.

Hello

Salam uncle, Amir is speaking.

Amir who?

Amir Sultan.  
 The son of Asaad?  
 No, the son of Masoud.  
 Ahh, salaam my son.  
 Uncle, we have a trip for two nights.  
 Yes I've heard.  
 We want Fidaa to come with us, we will protect her, please let her come!  
 My son I really can't, we are going to Gaza for a few days.  
 Ok.. ok uncle.. salaam  
 Send my best wishes to your dad.  
 Sure. Salam.

She looked at him.

She had a boyfriend from the class next door. Everyone loved her. Pretty, pleasant, modern, and called Nancy.  
 She arrived for a short visit. Fidaa I want to call Shady, when are your parents going out?  
 At noon.

Aziz didn't have any friends. Abo elbalad, they called him, 'cause he used to carry sticks and run after the boys in their grandmother's neighborhood. (They stayed there everytime Hatem understood that Fidaa is fed up.)  
 Aziz had pure eyes.

Hatem didn't cry when she came to life.  
 About him he did. And a lot.  
 The first. The second.

Fidaa, it seems that Aziz won't go out today, do something.  
 Aziz, go to Ramzi, or to Adel. We are two girls and want to sit together alone.  
 I don't want to go out Fidaa.  
 Aziz, I'm asking you to leave home.  
 I said I don't..

Hits. Hits. Hits on the door. Fidaa open the door, Fidaa open the door, Fidaa open the door. H.i.t.s.

Hello, may I speak to Shady?

Who ruined the door? asked Hatem. Aziz. Why did Aziz ruin the door? 'Cause I asked him to leave home. Do you know what could have happened to him if he hadn't ruined the door?  
 What?

Again. She loved the most popular boy in the whole school. This time he was called Yehia.  
 Little scraps of papers flew all over the class. No kite landed in her way. Once Zuhir passed her a note. She didn't open it. Why wouldn't you open it? Ok. It's for you Hannan.

Fidaa, who do you love?  
 I don't love anyone.  
 Liar.  
 I really don't love anyone.  
 As you wish darling.  
 Yehia.  
 Wow he is very cool, but he is with Sahar, no?  
 With Rokia.  
 He loves you?

To the store next to her house Yehia used to come.  
 (no pretty girls in the neighborhood)  
 Mama do you need anything from the store?  
 Ya, I need but don't have the money.  
 She gathered some and went, in a shirt drowned in bleach.  
 "Sorry I couldn't tell you good morning this morning, you were covered by lots of girls."  
 An empty face.

Morning. Her way to school. Fifty meters to the gate. Don't have the bag with me, she discovered. Returned home to bring her weapon, her dream.

I change my socks every day. I have an allergy. Said Hannan.  
 How is your sister?  
 She is ok but making troubles for her husband.  
 But they are still on their honeymoon!  
 Yesterday he asked to bathe with her and she kicked him out  
 Then why did she marry him?

She loved the sky, the blue sea swimming between its clouds. She looked for a place up there, amongst signs of absurdity.

Width-wise, like the sky, she grew between the memories she couldn't remember. Her father's wanderings, and his steps to calm her down, her visits to the toy shop and the emptying of his pockets, her holding as a hero to her grandfather's hand (who acted afraid to cross the streets, to make her smile), that she talked fast, tiktaktaktak, and was not understood, and that everyone loved her tik, tak.

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