

Najwan Darwish

Poems

“Reserved”

Once I tried to sit
On one of the vacant seats of hope
But the word “reserved”
Was squatting there like a hyena

(I did not sit down; no-one sat down)

The seats of hope are always reserved.

Translated from the Arabic by Kareem James AbuZeid

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The Nightmares Bus

I saw them stuff my aunts into plastic sacks
Their hot blood pooled in the corners of the bags
(But I have no aunts)
I knew they had killed Natasha, my three-year-old daughter
(But I have no daughter)
I was told they raped my wife, then dragged her body down the stairs and left it
lying in the street.
(But I am not married.)
Those are certainly my glasses that were crushed under their boots
(But I don't wear glasses)

.....

I slept in my parents' house and I was dreaming about her house. When I awoke
I saw my brothers
Hung
From the roof of the Church of the Resurrection
Out of compassion, the Lord said: this is my own suffering.

I mustered up the hanged men's pride and said: in my opinion, it's ours.
.....

Pain illuminates everything and I love it more than my nightmares.
.....

I will not flee to the North
Oh Lord
Don't count me among the ones seeming shelter
.....

We'll continue this report later.

I've got to go to sleep now.
I don't want to miss the nightmare bus that goes to Sabra and Shatila.

Translated from the Arabic by Marilyn Hacker and Antoine Jockey

Maryam

These days, my mother is enthralled in reading about Jesus. I see piles of books near her bed (she often takes them from my own bookshelves): novels, do-it-yourself manuals, books on the sects, quarrelling authors. Sometimes when I'm passing by her bedroom, she calls me to settle their disputes (not long ago I came to the aid of an Orthodox historian called Kamal Salibi after a Catholic stone had slashed his forehead!)

How serious she is in her research on Jesus, this woman whom I've always disappointed:

I wasn't martyred during the first Intifada, nor during the second, nor even during the third.

Just between us, I'm not going to become a martyr in any Intifada coming up
And I won't die blown up by a worry bomb either!

.....

She reads, and her Orthodox imagination crucifies me on every page
While all I do is supply her with more books and nails!

Translated from the Arabic by Marilyn Hacker and Antoine Jockey

Fabrication

The whole story is fabricated. Never have I believed the game that tells us you were slaughtered, and that your blood poured all the way to the Mediterranean only to be consumed by the sea. I am sure the story is all fabricated: Merriam Kershenbaum and Shlomo Ganor.

Al-Hurra (Free) [TV], al-Arabiyya (the Arabian) [TV], and Al-Jazeera (the Peninsula) [TV]. And without the parentheses and brackets, it would be the Free Arabian Peninsula.

Merriam Kershenbaum and Shlomo Ganor.

I am sure they are also fabricated.

The bills placed into my mailbox by a person I do not know. The name of my family in three different languages.

They, also, are fabricated.

This woman who loves me through my email.

Haifa, too, is fabricated.

This is why I never go down the street, and I only look at the sea from a perpendicular angle. Our friendship was in no one's account. No one took the time to fabricate it; this is why it remained true. Oh! I forgot, all truths are fabricated. This is why I enjoyed sharing with you all your Araq, apples, nuts and other things.

Nothing pressures me. This is why I am not torn when I see our land that has been stolen from us. The robbery was fabricated, checkpoints are fabricated and the soldiers are a bunch of kids who still wet themselves. The elderly Greek Orthodox women crossing into the Bethlehem checkpoint this morning are, also, fabricated. "In the name of the cross!" is said in a fabricated way. Good Friday is fabricated. The Byzantine-tunes at the Maronite church in Nazareth is fabricated. My enemies are fabricated, and my relatives are the epitome of fabrication. Inferno is fabricated, and Paradise is fabricated with even greater skill and contempt. (Damn! Is Fairouz's voice also fabricated?)

No nightmares haunt me, nightmares are fabricated. I do not suffer any disorders with my biological clock. I have no old enmity towards the sun, I do not suffer because of my inherited nature... all of these are fabricated titles.

I, too, am fabricated. Not because of who I am, but because all of the pronouns are fabricated.

I do not hate collaborators; see how I listen to their news commentators without vomiting?

I am not afraid of the alarm clock, or even AIDS and atomic weapons. I do not suffer a phobia from ringing door bells or ringing phones. The world will not end tomorrow... all of these are fabricated news.

I am tired of 21st century romanticism: romance mixed with the “shit” of consumers from all social classes. If you wanted to live you too must be tarnished with it as well. This is also another fabricated theory.

Rejoice and be merry! The boxes filled with defeat that are stacked up under your grandparents’ beds are fabricated. And you have been wailing all those years about losing your homelands. Dude! (Woe! As said in Classical way) Loss is fabricated. A big lie formed by robbers of your existence.

Merriam Kershenbaum Shlomo Ganor

Al-Arabiyya al-Hurra al-Jazeera

And that leper who holds the remote control.

Roaches and collaborators are nice creatures. Look at how gentle this one is, and how sweet the ugliness of that one’s face is. Our stereotypical ideas about their cheapness are fabricated.

A sedated group of men sit in the living room listening to the “Voice of Israel”. A respectable group of women make “Tabbouleh” and think about the future after having buried our public dignity.

Don’t worry, these are all fabricated.

We cannot respect a few trees in front of our homes, leaving the mountains for those who set up the nets in our naps.

On the 22nd of April, 1948, Haifa surrendered. The date is fabricated.

On the 8th of December, 1917, a few Effendis carried their white flag and a picture was taken of them as they surrendered Jerusalem. The event truly took place, but the picture is fabricated.

You can, at any given time, gather a few Effendis and ask them to carry a white flag and march with it to Jaffa Gate to take a picture.

The time is 11:30 just before noon on the first of April 2010.

Everyone went to sleep and awoke, and I am still up. Pillows are fabricated. In two weeks I will be going to Beirut. The Visa is an enormously fabricated obstacle. Oh, Our Lady of Lebanon, pray for us (though we know your prayer is fabricated.)

In a while I am going to sleep, as my wacky friend rides the bus from Nazareth. Words in Hebrew are flying around her like flies because she thinks the language of the enemy is a corpse, so I tell her: This is a fabricated ideology, the language of the enemy is a sexless robot. She bursts into a wacky, fabricated, laughter. We burst into laughter. Oh god, we won’t die. We run into eternity as our flip-flops tap along. Eternity is fabricated. Everything that proceeded was a fabrication. Everything to come is also a fabrication. And each creature is raising its arms like a tree in this fabricated poem.

Translated from the Arabic by Susan Hamad

There

Men killed since the Mandate years are at night

listening to the BBC and sobbing.

The detained in Acre Prison have

yet to break the hunger strike of the 1936 revolt

And people at Mandelbaum Gate are still waiting

For Hell to open.

There,

a language is trying to mend a land

that it may embody the naked

waking up

in this hallowed exile

at the world's end.

There,

Droplets of blood are seeping

From a word as it were the foot

of Jesus Christ.

(Translated from the Arabic by Kamal Boullata)

Clouds

I have no brothers to lift the sky off my back

no daughters to comfort my trees.

I have no grandchildren to inherit the lakes

no flame to light up the fireplace

no winsome relative to water the violets.

Nothing but these homeless clouds

to walk one day at my funeral.

Translated from the Arabic by Kamal Boullata
