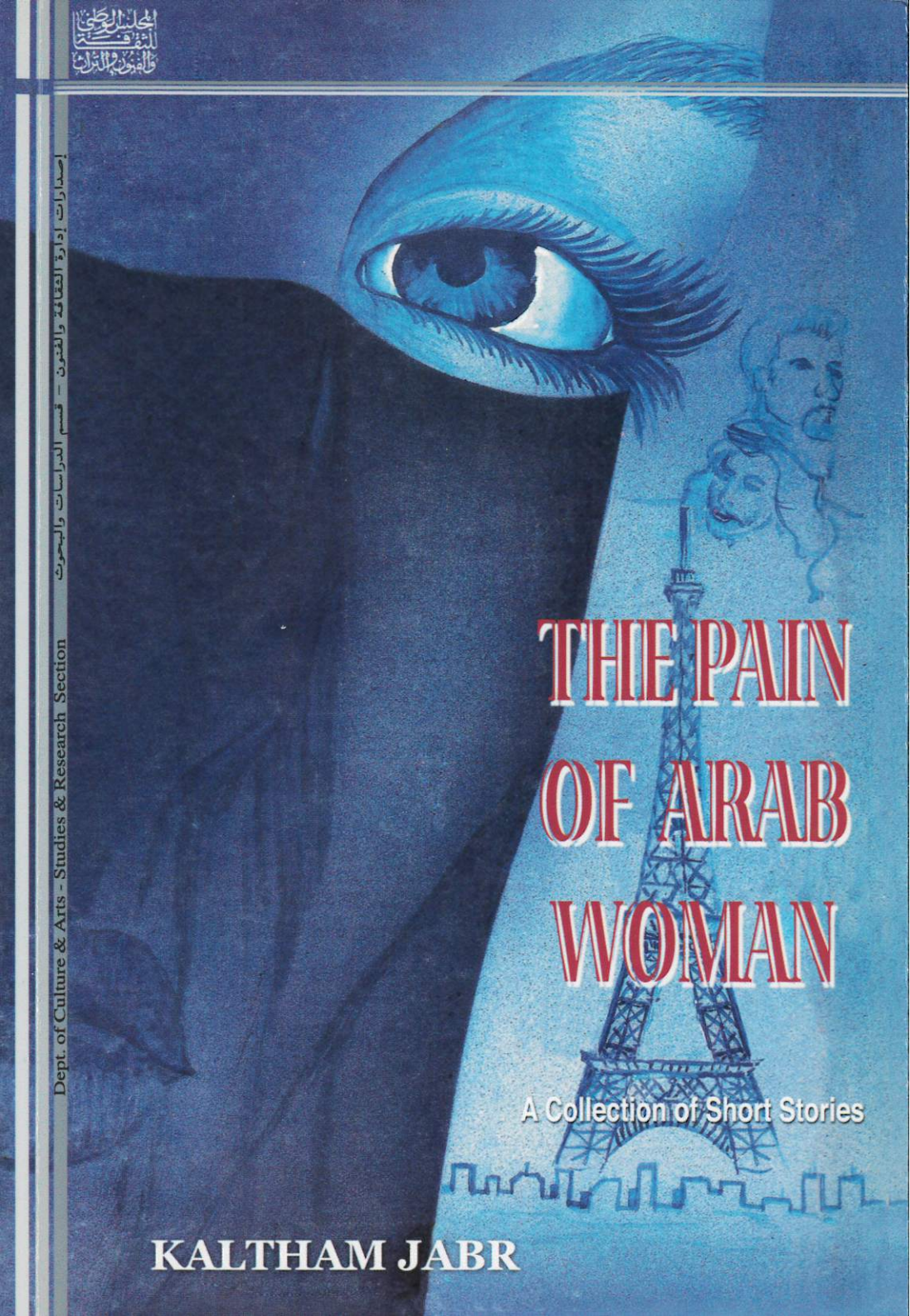




THE PAIN OF ARAB WOMAN

A Collection of Short Stories

KALTHAM JABR

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A Collection of Short Stories by
KALTHAM JABR

Translated by
Elnur Osman Abbaker

The Pain of an Arab Woman

By Dr Katham Jabr

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FOREWORD

By The Department of Culture and Arts

Literature is considered one of the most important means of the communication and approach among the various peoples of the world for literature is the mirror of life embodying the national character, reflecting the cultural and social history and expressing the identity of the people.

This prompted the Department of the Culture and Arts to set an ambitious programme for the translation of selections from the Qatari literature to introduce it to the world and put it on the chart of international literature.

The history of contemporary Qatari literature is not different from the history of contemporary Arabic Literature in terms of form and content.

We have taken this into consideration in choosing these selections so as to represent accurately the creative work in the various types of literary arts such as the short story and the novel.

Our ambitious translation programme concentrates on translation into the English language since it is the most widespread language in the world and we aspire that our programme will include the French Language in the near future.

Our attempts to translated Qatari Literature will continue in the future which is a genuine expression of the policy of the State of Qatar which aims at opening up to the world and communicating with other peoples and civilizations.



INTRODUCTION

By Ustaz Rajaa Al Nakkash

In terms of creativity, the Arab woman kept silent for many centuries. After the Abbasid age (750 to 1258 A D) where some singing slave girls wrote poetry at times, we have not heard of any Arab woman artist or writer until the appearance of the poetess Aisha Al Taimuriya towards the end of the previous century. She was followed by Malak Nasif who chose the pseudo name 'Bahithatu Al-Badiya' the desert searcher. Then there was Mai Ziyada and a number of names well known in contemporary Arabic literature such as Suhair Alqalamawi, Amina Al Saeed, Bint Al Shatti, Fadwa Tuqan, Nazik Al Malaika and Ghada Al-Samman.

It will take long if we were to concentrate on the reasons that prevented the Arab woman from expressing herself after Alkhansaa in the first Islamic era until modern times. That is, anyway, another issue relating to the social circumstances under which the Arab woman lived during several generations and centuries.

Yet the striking phenomenon is that the Arab woman in our present century is making a serious bid to express herself and her society. Her performance in this domain reached a great measure of participation in the cultural, social and national developments. It is enough to refer to Nazik al Malaika who has been since the forties a pioneer in the field of modernization of Arabic poetry among both men and women. We can also refer to Fadwa Tuqan, a pioneer in the same field, in addition to being an honest and talented expression of the afflictions of her Palestinian people in their distress, which is considered the gravest Arab tragedy in modern times. Fadwa Tugan managed in her prose and poetry to move from the subjective, limited expression of personal sentiments and experiences to the comprehensive human experience of the Arab new generations that resist injustice and backwardness and try to obtain their right to a decent life.

This is a new and outstanding literary and artistic experience, which is almost like that of Fadwa Tuqan, presented by a young talented and cultured Arab girl who was born and spent most of her life in the Arab Gulf society. She is from Qatar, but had from the very beginning a wonderful human fire inside her that drove her to travel to Europe to get acquainted with the reality of modern civilization and also made her go to Egypt for further studies and education.



This artist and writer is Kaltham Jabr. I have not known the writer in person. I knew her as a writer when I was the Chief Editor of Doha Magazine of Qatar from 1981 until its closure in September 1986. Kaltham used to send to the magazine some of her short stories, which I was happy to publish because I felt that there was a real talent behind her words, and truthfulness and a fire that awakens us to a unique human experience.

This is the second collection of short stories by Kaltham Jabr. She chose for it the title of the first story in this collection: The Pain of an Arab Woman. From the very first lines of the story, we recognize the artistic and human value of Kaltham Jabr and her beautiful deep writing. What strikes one in this collection is that it has a noticeable poetic and musical note and air. The writer does not carve into the rocks but rather writes with the beak of a small bird picking up things in sweeping speed and then flying off to settle on a branch, or a bird content in a small calm and neat nest it builds for itself and its young. However, the branch is not shut off from the wind or storm. All natural sounds have strong, continuous echoes in it. It is a nest that is not isolated from life, though small or warm and tightly built. We read in the first story, which is "The Pain of an Arab Woman" this sweet and beautiful part:

It may be the second evening, or the tenth. The clock strikes ten or eight or a thousand. I stretch me across the bed, alone. I impress my fingers in the flesh of my face and the ends of my hair, and lean on the bed, silently. I am very much aware of the voice behind me. The face gets near to me. I am very much aware of its features. The breaths close on my face. I am aware of them. The arm encloses my shoulder and falls on it: [But it does not produce any feeling.]

- "What's with you? "

[I fall into estrangement, alone.]

- "I love you".

[I fall into estrangement, alone]

- "Say it to me".

[Sadness swells inside me and drops pain into my veins. I bleed bitterness, which I swallow silently.]

The other, the woman, does not utter a word, but bleeds inside, what looks like a beautiful musical playing, while it is equally angry and sad.

This is Kaltham Jabr's style in all her collection. It is poetic, instant, breathless, mostly without connective words, as if the whole collection of stories is one continuous sentence, expressing one spiritual state and a sad, angry rebellious world vision.

This poetic breathtaking continual though at the same time disrupted, is the truest and most exact and controlled style of expressing the human experiences depicted by this wonderful collection of short stories. That is because the writer does not seek to portray the external, concrete, objective abstract reality. She is keen on depicting the echoes of reality on herself, her feelings and anguished heart. Realistic incidents are few in this collection. Place is drawn in light, elegant lines, with no details or density. The characters are nearest to being fertive, wandering souls, evil or good, because the eye of the artistic writer is turned to the depths of the turbulent human sea and not to its surface, its shores and outer features.

This poetic and musical style and the position searching for the inner currents of the human self and not the outer visible conflicts, was capable of leading the writer to a kind of simple romantic writing, full of shrieks, tears and sentimental expression based on exaggeration that reeks of a closed ego - all of which are elements to make literature brittle, easy and liable for quick melting when exposed to the first sun ray.

However, Kaltham Jabr escapes with her talent and fine feeling of life and things from this easy romanticism, and rises with her literature to another level, which we can call poetic realism or musical realism because Kaltham does not live in illusions or dreams or false fancies. She is shielded with high culture, which has been enhanced with a scrutinizing eye into life that helped her exclude, in her artistic expression all that is transitory and formal. There is no place for tears in her beautiful writing, no place for sighs and exaggerations. Kaltham Jabr has tuned her literary chords very finely to express real agonies and true pains, and not transient feelings and simple conventional sham problems.

The outcome of our reading of this collection of short stories is a deep feeling of human alienation. It is real and not concocted estrangement. It is clear and can end and disappear when its causes are removed. This is what makes sadness in this collection a rebellious and not a despairing sadness, to the extent that we feel that it is essentially a sadness that embodies joy. It resembles a child full of vitality, beauty and good health; yet it is a child tied by many chains of taboos and prohibitions. Hence it is fidgety and sometimes cries and screams, wanting to come out of its fettered innocence to a wider world of knowledge and experience and the best understanding of life, of people and of things. It is an inquisitive child and not a naïve one. It is a child that wants to grow, to develop and leap to faster phases of progress and maturity.

This is Kaltham Jabr's sadness in her collection of the "The Pain of an Arab Woman". It is a sadness that knocks on all closed doors and windows to open them; to breathe a more pure air; to see a more brilliant light and find wide roads to run after all the colored butterflies in life; to reveal the secrets and the unknown in this earth and choose from all these positions and free acts and not those prescribed and imposed on it.

We can notice in this collection the existence of many keys, even in the words, that show us the latent desire for freedom, for experience and getting to know life deeply and directly and not through others who impose their positions on others as if they were decisions that must be executed.

Of such keys are the words 'airport, departure, bag, rain, estrangement and the central word pain/agony/which colour all these beautiful stories. These words denote motion and aversion to sticking to one material or moral position. The words airport and departure strongly imply the wish for renewal and inquisitiveness for wider, deeper knowledge, and rejection of the narrow geographical walls that turn ones life into a prison. The word rain when written and repeated by a Gulf woman living in a desert or semi-desert environment denotes fascination with a life that is renewable and a soil mixed with water that gives growth to flowers and fruits that sing the song of



greater life against stagnation, repetition and inaction. 'Pain is the movement of the human body in search of well-being and health. Physical maladies are curable; but the serious illnesses are those that hide their pangs and conceal them until they burst unexpectedly to kill and stop the movement of life

As much as this collection expresses the desire for movement and deliverance from inertia and stagnation, it also expresses a warm yearning for belonging and the spiritual security it gives and the untampered potential for giving. Estrangement in this collection of stories is not final, with no solution; it is the estrangement of the search for a haven, a land of peace, of human understanding, of sincere sentiments and thought based on true grounds.

In the story : "Departure and the Heat" ,the hero forsakes all shows of stability and content because they are based on illusion and deception ,and departs in search of true human belonging that is free of all sorts of treason and lying.

I do not want to summarize any of the stories in this collection because it is difficult if not impossible to do so. One cannot summarize a piece of music. Kaltham's collection is all music. How can one summarize or speak about its content? To do so would make it lose all its transparent spirit, its warm feeling and elevated true artistic stimulation. However, we can speak about the general atmosphere in this collection and say it is a sad atmosphere. Its sadness dictates its own rhythm, which gives the collection a sweet, tender poetic quality. It is optimistic sadness because the writer artist expresses her rejection of a restrictive life and dreams of a free unrestrained reality. To her, freedom is not absurd liberty or physical freedom, for such freedom is trivial and easy to attain despite all chains. The desired freedom is that of the heart, the mind, the soul and the will. It is a freedom that is not for the individual alone but is enjoyed by all. If the individual were free in a fettered and oppressed community, he would not be happy, especially if he is of an open mind and sensitive heart.

Kaltham Jabr's collection of stories is a beautiful sweet and sad song for true unaffected freedom without which the happiness of the individual or the group cannot be attained.

Having read the collection of 'The Agony of an Arab Woman', I find myself comparing it with Francoise Sagan's writing that stirred great row in her society in the fifties of the last century with her novel 'Good Morning Sadness 'Bonjour Tristesse. It is a novel we can call 'Agony of a French Woman. The similarity between Sagan's style and Kaltham Jabr's is very strong. In both, there is poetry, music and a flowing current of internal awareness of man. Yet I felt without any presumptions that I prefer Kaltham Jabr to Sagan, because the Arab writer convinced me in her collection that she expresses a personal as well as a collective experience while Sagan was tied to her own sorrows and had no common cause from which to spring or to express. Hence, Sagan remains loveable and provocative of sympathy because she truly expressed the worries of a French woman who is innocent and curious. Kaltham Jabr is more beautiful and more profound because she expressed the sorrows of an Arab woman, which rose up to become the sorrows of a whole society of men and women; a society yearning to change, to rise to rid itself of its shortcomings and problems; a society dreaming of rain, of traveling bags and departure; a society curious to know more and become more humane and closer to the higher, simpler facts of life.

The success of the writer is due to her clear artistic talent without which her stories would have been a kind of dry reports of the state of the Arab woman in the Gulf. Reporting writing in general is bereft of value. Research and study writing is better than it. The artist's job is not to copy reality as it is and give evidence to the truth of such copying. That is the task of scholars and researchers and not of the artist. Art is to convey feeling and emotion, be it beautiful or negative. Via high quality art, man's vision is illuminated to make him know what is right and what is wrong, and become really enthusiastic to advance himself, his behavior, his society and civilization.

To further this critical point in talking about the mission of art through models known to those acquainted with both world and Arabic literatures, we find, for instance, in Hemmingway's short stories (1961-1899-) a special expression of the American society. He glorifies nature and the human instinct, and sings of the basic inner traits in man such as patience, endurance and persistence. Reading his short beautiful novel "The Old Man and the Sea", we feel all these meanings and sympathize with them, and know the strong reason that fired in Hemmingway's heart this strong sweet

human vision. Hemmingway lives in the heart of the flourishing strong American civilization that depends on scientific progress and cares little - in the clamour of machines - for personal human feelings. There is no place for such feelings in the noisy big cities such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and others. There is no place in this new contemporary vortex for sentimental whispering between two lovers, no place for the sorrows of a poet, nor for quiet, splendid beauty offered by a flower swaying with its scent and colour in a garden. Modern man in the roaring industrial civilization has to stop the current of his inner feelings and develop his will and conscious mind and exact planning so as to find a place for himself in the civilization of aeroplanes, rockets and computers. If he does not do so, he will fall out in the crowd. Hemmingway did indeed commit suicide in 1961 before the advent of the computer and its dominance and extended impacts. However, Hemmingway was aware that the imp-bottle of advanced science was open and would stop at no limits. Hence, his entire artistic edifice was directed to a rebellion against this age that seeks to nullify man's feelings, emotions and passions, and turn him into a part of the huge machine of modern times.

The great writer wanted to raise the status of poetry above that of digits and the roar of machines. He wanted man to remain the stronger, the more dominant over nature and things. He wanted the beauty created by God on this earth to remain raised above the horrible machine interventions. Hence, Hemmingway portrayed in his novel "The Old Man and the Sea" that old angler who is man in this universe and this age. The fisherman kept struggling against the sea and the winds, using his simple weapons, without complaining or whimpering, though he was not successful in gaining his sustenance, and the world did not ask about him or knew him. Yet the fisherman kept working, fighting and refusing despair. He fought the difficulties facing him and denying him any moment of peace or security. He was strong and confident because he used his will and patience and the will of life burst in him despite continuing frustration. The novel - The Old Man and the Sea - is a song of great beauty and truth. It tells us that however modern civilization might divest man of his power and capabilities; he remains with his feelings and inner reality the most beautiful creature.

Hemingway did not copy a reality he was experiencing and suffering from, which is the reality of the destructive mechanical civilization. He placed human rebellion on the reality. He depicted the pride and feeling of defeat and pain and failure of the effort to win and succeed. After having written this brilliant musical poetical novel, Hemmingway shot himself and departed from a world that did not comfort him nor did he like it, which is a strange paradox. The hero in the Old Man and the Sea did not commit suicide despite the cruelty of what he suffered but rather remained patient to the end. He will remain a symbol of patience and endurance as long as there is beautiful art.

However, Hemmingway was less capable of endurance than his patient hero who was determined to raise his head in the face of abandonment. The writer took his life and the hero of the story is alive because fine art does not perish.

The task of the artist is not to copy reality or monitor it scientifically and documentarily, but is to discover what is human in such reality and portray it truly, honestly and beautifully.

This is what Kaltham Jabr did in her collection of short stories. She does not copy facts but portrays feelings, reactions and kinds of winds that blow in the Arab self.

Hence, Kaltham Jabr chose to make her short story a mixture of the narrative and the lyrical. She often allows the lyrical to override the narrative because the latter depends on description and reporting of places, of characters and external structures. We can therefore say that the short story in the hands of Kaltham Jabr is closer to the poem. This style is very common in modern literature- both foreign and Arabic - because the narrative became a task performed by the gigantic media apparatus such as the press, TV and radio, while reporting is the task of many research centers that are most powerful in documenting and verifying. There is no justification for many details in a novel or a story in the fashion of Dickens or Flaubert or the early works of Nageeb Mahfouz in the thirties and forties. Modern art is the art of concentration, distillation, reference and nice intelligent glimpses, which make any details or statements superfluous.

It is clear from the collection that the writer Kaltham Jabr has completed her artistic tools very neatly. She is a cultured reader of language and poetry, which is seen in her pointed words, brief phrases, and poetic hints that are rich in emotions, positions and feelings. She is an artist who is acquainted with the modern nature of the short story. Hence, she keeps away from too much monotonous story telling and the search for a structure based on the beginning, the middle, the climax and the end, which are excellent elements of the old short story styles that are no longer convincing or interesting for modern readers. However hard the storyteller might invent events and surprises, he cannot attain the ability of the TV to show realistic and marvelous events on its screen every day and moment.

Therefore, the storyteller who narrates, tells, and tries to invent strange wonderful events can only be working in a futile void. Yet the artistic style used by Kaltham Jabr in the manner of a skilled woman using her knitting needle in weaving a silk robe could have led the artist come out of the field of short story writing to that of free verse and ideas, had it not been for the real talent of the Gulf writer. She does not desert altogether the original nature of the story, where there are events, characters, situations and conflicts. Kaltham Jabr preserved those narrative elements and the narrative world in her modern robe. There are men and women in the stories; the conflict between situations is alive and hot and tangible, though every thing in her stories is in a style that is nearer to that of the ballet, i.e. Little talk and much movement, gesture, facial and hand and finger expression.

Kaltham Jabr freed herself in her stories from that shortcoming of the ordinary writer who insists that his stories have a moral, as though he is preaching or teaching us with his stories. Many have fallen into this pit that turned their work into a kind of disciplinary and reformist writing which is short-lived and hardly touches one's soul or heart.

Kaltham Jabr's vision is not moralistic, reformist or disciplinary; it is a civilized vision. The character she expresses and the spiritual ambition that preoccupies her, fills her dreams, and enriches her heart is a person who resembles our new requirements: a free person who does not accept moral oppression on himself nor practise it on others, specially not on the woman who has many painful chapters in the history of Arab injustices.

Finally, if I have a negative remark to say about this collection , it is that the writer makes me sometimes feel that she is frightened, trembling, hesitant to make her stories true to all the fires that burn in her mind and conscience. I feel at times that she does not have enough trust in her talent; so she keeps silent when she is expected to continue revealing her visions and portraying this vision. Maybe this is what explains the meagerness of production of this talented writer. I can only say to this esteemed writer that art is a power against fear. In fact, art is a total alternative to fear. Naguib Mahfouz was right when he said once, "When I hold the pen, I do not care for anything."

So, fear nothing, sister. Life will not give us but one of two things: either art with its fire and blaze and its courage and break through barbed wires in spite of all wounds, or stagnant living, engulfed in contentedness, inertia, luxurious laziness that is barren of wonder, surprise or even discovery of new springs in the self and society.

Rajaa Al Nakkash

The Pain of an Arab Woman

[1]

[I fall into estrangement]

But the voice keeps talking to me. The coffee cup is warm. He shakes my shoulder. I feel his fingers piercing into my flesh, though they do not pain.

[Travail in the memory]

"Haven't you taken your medicine this morning?" he whispers into my face. I keep silent. He shouts into my face. I remain silent. [Inside, sadness intensifies and widens.] I stretch a trembling hand to pick up the coffee, but it pours into the opening of my chest. I keep silent.

"You have definitely not taken your medicine!"

He shakes my shoulder yet again, but [I fall into estrangement, alone.]

[2]

It may be the second evening, or the tenth. The clock strikes ten or eight or a thousand. I stretch me across the bed, alone. I impress my fingers in the flesh of my face and the ends of my hair, and lean on the bed, silently. I am very much aware of the voice behind me. The face gets near to me. I am very much aware of its features. The breaths close on my face. I am aware of them. The arm encloses my shoulder and falls on it: [But it does not produce any feeling.]

- "What's with you?"

[I fall into estrangement, alone.]

- "I love you".

[I fall into estrangement, alone]

- "Say it to me".

[Sadness swells inside me and drops pain into my veins. I bleed bitterness, which I swallow and keep silent.]

- "Say it so that I leave you alone and keep silent"

- [I fall into estrangement. Inside me, the cruelty of cold nights rages. The anguish that kept dragging me for many nights to throw me into the pit of Bohemianism is ravishing me. Other voices rise inside me, full of grief. Sadness grieves inside me and trembles.] I whisper with difficulty:

- "I can't"

The dust winds of my town knock on the doors and the window. The echo of my tense husband complains".

"Won't this wife come to her senses?"

[3]

I lie on the pure sands of the deserted beach. I draw traces of distant lying feet on its sands from my memory. I raise my face to follow the passing steps. I am aware that the place is not the place, nor the time is the time. The sunny town I live in is thousands of miles away, and here I am resting in these deserted beaches of one of the cold cities.

But the face beside me is not my husband's whose features I know very well. It smiled as he winked with one of his eyes:

- "Do you know how beautiful you are?"

The voice is rusty. I move my face and look away from him and shake the memory stems so that the face would drop for me to know it.

But my head fails me and gets up coldly. I ask innocently:

- "Who are you?"

He holds the tips of my dangling tresses and wonders. He plants his wide eyes in mine and wonders.

- "Me? Are you kidding?"

Have I been ill again to be dragged into dark tunnels?

I have been led to this by the face lying beside me now and wondering how I could not recognize it. What I decry at this moment of my consciousness and dread is from where had I brought it beside me at this moment?

I rise up, gathering this moment of consciousness before it eludes me, and the rest of strength that I sense which enables me to walk quickly away from those features. But they follow me. The echo of the voice panting behind me catches up with me, grips my fingers. I withdraw them in fear. He obstructs my face and raises his fingers, wondering:

- "Do you know what you're saying?"
- "Yes. Who are you?" I said in strange defeatedness that pained me.
- "I?"

He burst out laughing. I let him be. I tried to run, but was unable to. I tried, but fell on the sands. Anguish and dread filled me. My mother's wailing face appeared suddenly before me. And my father's deterring voice. I fell. With me fell into the sand the scorching winds of my town, the closely built mud houses, the children's mote in the eyes, my tribal belonging, and Ahmed's face migrating from the siege of his desperate belonging to studying, his straying reality which he hugged every night and slept, the desperate waiting of his mother for his return. All those fell with me on the sands. I cried over the reality of my lost city and the silence that shrouded it on the outside. The wondering face still keeps looking at me.

(I fall, tired and fainting).

(4)

It rains ferociously on the window. Dense steam develops inside the room. I tremble in the easy chair and look out of the other window at the bare branches of the tree, and water drops slipping on them to fall on the ground or remain hanging there. I clasp my palm to my bosom and keep silent after the conversation between us.

The doctor rises from behind the papers and the old bureau. He nears my face, sits on the chair facing me. He extends his hand, holds my palms, looks piercingly into my face, and resumes asking:

- "What happened afterwards?"

With the interlacing of the dream inside me and the duplicity of the moment I live, I continued saying:

"I ran away from him. I tried to run more, but fell on the sands several times. He did not try to follow me, until I came back to where I stay. He remained alone at the beach".

The doctor let go of my palm. It was still clasped on my bosom. He tried to move it and bend it on my knee, but failed and let it dangling.

- "Try to remember how you got acquainted with him."

I press on my memory. It secretes pain and many intermingled eyes. I screamed:

- "I do not know where from he had come."

I lay on the cold bed, tilted upwards, the injection pierces into the vein. I feel slow, cold numbness trickling into my veins. I relax and the eyes and faces recede. I remain alone and calm, looking at the broad face smiling over my head:

- "I am your doctor and no body else. Do you understand that?"

I shake my head affirmatively. He parts my hair tresses from my face and whispers:

- "You are a beautiful girl. Aren't you?"

(I fall into a sweet bohemian feeling benumbing my veins.)

- "And you have no husband.."

(I swim in a lake of mingled colours.)

And the cry of a baby rises.. and rises. I get up with a heavy head. I cannot stand to look for it, but bump against the broad palm and broad smiling face. I try to stand up. He smiles:

- "What are you looking for?"

- "Is this a baby crying?" said I in a rattling voice. He was surprised, and looked about him."

- "But I don't hear anything."

The baby face takes shape inside me. It springs from among all the faces, and stays. I am very much aware of it and its tiny fingers as they play with my bosom and hair and extend more to hug my face. I am aware of its smile and weeping. I break into sobs and weeping and whisper:

- "It is my child's crying."

(5)

Near the shining glass of the hotel foyer, I sink into a leather chair, alone, silent, hiding my fingers in the pockets of my white woolen shirt. I raise my eyes to the waiter standing beside me:

- "A cup of coffee and the paper, please."

He shakes his blonde hair and leaves. I gather my strewn moments and become completely aware of who I am. The rain drops knock on the glass gate. I lean with my head on the chair's rest. I am very well aware of my schizophrenic state. My doctor's words ring in the memory:

- "You can continue your daily life away from the corridors of the hospital. But you must come to me before you pack for the return to your city. You're Okay now."

I smile in sarcasm. I am well only because I managed to snipe my consciousness and know who I am and remember that I have a husband and a child. I sip the hot coffee, open the morning paper and smile at the waiter who brought it. A cold wind and a residue of pain creep inside. But I fix my eyes into the paper .. and read

- "Good morning," he said in an Arabic accent from behind the paper.

- "Good morning," I replied and went on reading. But the fingers of the voice extended to the newspaper. I was faced with some looks. I closed my eyes, sought help from the memory. The face staying beside me on the deserted beach appeared smiling:

- "Do you still not know me? I came to know that you were ill through the hotel."

I was silent again. I did not answer (But I am aware of the face and how I met it in a noisy evening when the many eyes cornered me and shouted at me. The grim face came up to pull me to his Bohemian trip in the dark cellars. I rushed to the outside and met him outside the place where I was residing. In the dark, he led me to a Café. In the dark, I knew him as an Arab, sad and escaping from his anguish. In the dark, he knew me as an Arab girl of unknown identity, infested with her sadness.

When morning broke, and after I refused to take my medicine, he led me or I led him to the deserted beach after I forged my identity to him and looked like a girl of twenty staying there for studying.

- "Do you still not know me?"

- "I know you very well."

- "But ... last time."

I rose up and promised him another meeting.

On another day, at the cold airport, my fingers extended to greet his broken face after he knew my sick reality and the pile up of my human anguish, and I was there for medical treatment and not for studying. He also knew my husband's face and my child, who were waiting for me on the pavement of our city that was silent on the outside and clamorous inside with the scorching winds, the luxury and duplicity.

October 1985

The Heat and Departure

(1)

The children naively repeated my words. They repeated them unconsciously.

I have to repeat the words again to inculcate them in those minds. To engrave them in the pale expectant eyes, staring at me. Their eyes stare at me in odd silence.

- Right! Virtue! Justice!

The little throats got dry. Mine, too. A tiny red streak of blood came out of my throat and ran as far as I could see, covering the ground, the walls, the love and virtue and my children's faces.

I might have frightened the children with those words. Their eyes were glowing, frightened embers. Nonetheless, they made my university professor laugh. He described them as non-existing idealism. He paused, smiled and said:

"A nice way to escape reality".

I wish I could pull him out of his university robe, crucify him in front of me and shout at him:

"I've explained myself till I turned into a corpse. I smelt the nasty odor spreading out of me, swallowed my reality and escaped to an idealism of which I dreamt, and which you cannot attain with this apparel of yours!"

Once more, I instruct the children:

- Right ! Virtue! Justice!

The echo of laughter of my university professor, crucified in his uniform, is on my face. I wipe my face from the echo of his sticky laughter and spit on the floor his very well-studied principles that he teaches me.

The children were gazing in intensified fright. A whispering voice moved, nearing me, followed by a little daring hand shaking me gently:

"Teacher! Are you ill?"

(2)

I put off the light in my room, and dive into the snug bed. All my belongings are comfortable, dewy and moist. Yet my heart is an arid land, thirsty for rain. Wanting rain. It never rained in my regions since his eyes became the cave of my dreams. I used to escape to his eyes alone, where I would rest and find the utopia I dream of. I sit on the ground, seat him in front of me and whisper:

"I love your eyes, your voice and the utopia of my dreams".

He keeps silent. I see him slip to the deepest depths and keep silent. He fears. Trembles. Fear invaded his eyes as it did the eyes of the young ones the day I spat on the floor the well-studied principles of my university professor.

"I am a companion of silence. But I hate it when with you".

The eyes I love quiver. Their lashes flutter. He moves back a little:

"Will you be afraid once again?"

- "Fear is a feeling, like love. I love and fear you. Believe me. I fear you. I fear the utopia of the ideal city of which you dream. You are building fragile palaces".

His eyes have a quaint charm.

He was trembling as on the day he stood before my father. It was not fear of him; I was the cause of his fear. I know that, which increased my vanity. His eyes attracted me. I kept gazing at them. He was stammering. My father took him away from my raiding eyes to the other sitting room.

He advised him as to what he had to do. My father's voice's forceful accents reach me as I sit planted in my place:

"We have the sun, burning heat and oil. You have consciousness and effort. We are people who can see faithfulness - sincerity".

He bent his head and disappeared. My eyes were watching him very closely.

"I fear ..."

He sprang up... like a whirlwind.

(3)

"Father... This man is nice. He has right and sincerity".

"Are you still repeating these words?"

"Father... Am I wrong to call for a society in which prevail right, goodness and ..."

But my father disappeared. Since I have come to discern, and this awareness hunts me - my father has not finished any discussion with me. He would discontinue the conversation and escape, fearful of my madness. I know that my father fears my madness.

He calls this idealism madness. He was afraid of this madness. And I am afraid of myself. I am afraid. But fear is a word I cannot accept. So, I have to possess his eyes.

He was bent over the papers with his forehead's veins protruding, devouring the words. I was looking for his eyes. My gazes burnt him. He raised his face, saw me and panicked. Panic, myself and him are associated and are simultaneously present.

He stood up, bent his head and sat down again.

"What brought you here? Oil or the heat?"

He paused. Then raised his eyes:

"Livelihood?"

"Licitly?"

He gazed into my face, surprised, and panicked again, shouted forcibly as he pounded the glass table and the papers:

"Yes. Licitly".

"I hate to be silent with you".

"I'm pained. I'm fed up with talking. I loathe idealism and love reality".

"What is holding you?"

"It pains me to speak".

"Your colleagues... what about them?"

"They are the cause of my sickness. Talking pains me. But I'm sore. I hate dishonesty. They are plotting to steal from your father. I hate treason. I feel I'm betraying them. Your father has to find out on his own. But you are the cause for changing the course of things. I hate faithlessness. But they are stealing from your father".

"What about the licit livelihood?"

"I aspire to it. Others seek it at all costs through the shortest means".

"It is illicit, then. I won't tell my father. He has to find out for himself. He could have smelt it before it spread. Now he has to".

He struck the wall with both fists, like a foolish child, and pulled out Imreul Qais, Nizar and Shelly from the book shelf and flung them, trampled them under his feet, and gasped:

"You and... those... are the cause of my misery".

I smiled gleefully as I neared them, raised Imreul Qais with the tip of my foot, then dropped it once again. Then I asked in a fearful whispering:

"What drove them to that? Where is Right, Virtue and Justice?"

(5)

I opened the door. The man standing at the door surprised me. I know him very well. Since I was a child, my mother kept threatening me with him to make me sleep, study... and...

I turned, raised my voice calling:

"Father! It is the policeman".

My father's steps outpaced my curiosity, led him inside. I remained behind the door. My heartbeats increased. I could see half the policeman's face through the half-closed door. I overheard them. Nevertheless I knew why he came.

"Let it be decisive, but quietly. I fear God. Satan has been created to tempt people".

I smiled in irony:

"He is my father preaching: Why doesn't he ask them what drives them to steal? He is my father, though. And he preaches!"

"As you like.

Where are they?"

I did not raise my head, though my father bumped against me as he emerged. He went. The policeman got into his car. He left me standing and went. The policeman was with him.

(6)

It is three in the morning. My fingers kept dialing the numbers. I kept calling him for hours. The receiver was hung up.

"Where have you been?"

"Good morning".

"Where are you? I have been phoning you for hours".

"How are you?"

"Where have you been?"

"With my colleagues. Earlier, I was with your father and the policeman".

"What happened?"

"Your father was kind. I'll return to my home country tomorrow".

"Tomorrow?"

I threw the phone. My hands preceded my feet. I left him talking and rushed, my hands opening doors, knocking on doors, shaking my father in his bed. My mother woke up; put on the light. My father was silent. He looked at me very forcefully.

"Why he, too, father?"

"He was with them. He knew they were stealing, but said nothing. He defended them, said they were poor. Need drove them to that. He defended them, said their pay was less than the effort they exerted. He defended them, said that I have exhausted them, and drove them to steal. I drove them to steal? Anyway, he saw them steal and kept silent. He is one of them. He knew, but kept silent".

"He wanted to tell you, father. But I prevented him".

"You?"

"His eyes and voice are the symbol of my utopia".

"He was truthful, father. Justice requires that you condemn the culprit. But he is not that, father".

"So?"

"He is to be exempted".

"O.K. Let it be".

I sighed. My feet were now the ones to outpace my hand to my room. I picked up the receiver that was lying on the bed, and whispered:

"You are exempted".

He kept silent, and then said:

"Sleep well. Good night".

And hung up. I hid in my bed and slept.

[7]

It was the same seat. The same wall. Nizar, Imreul Gais and others were on the ground. Sketches in blue pen on the wall expressing a measure of feelings. The room was cold and cheerless. I was searching, anxiously searching. I turned over the papers, the bed, the cupboard, and the kitchenware. I went back to the bolder lines on the wall, and shouted at them:

"Where is he? Where are his eyes? His voice?"

I shouted. Turned over everything. I trampled the remnants of Imreul Gais under my feet and returned to the house. I blew out like a hurricane:

"Father!"

He was standing next to the wall on which was hung a large picture of myself drawn by a wandering painter I met same day during my wanderings in that cold city. He was touched by my curiosity, my hair and eyes. He asked to draw me. He made me sit on the pavement and drew me. My father was waiting. Afterwards, he took my picture and had it hung on the wall. He said in admiration as he looking at the lines of his eyes in my eyes.

"He is really an artist".

"Father! Where are his eyes? I looked for them everywhere, but could not find them. I saw Nizar bleeding on the floor. And Byron. But did not see them. I saw the blue lines he once wrote on the wall to prove to me he was honest, but did not see them. The echo of his whispers was not there. Where is he, father?

He quietly faced my tornado and said:

"He's gone. I told him that you... But he left. He said he felt guilty of betrayal. He said he had betrayed his colleagues when he told you about them, that he betrayed them when he failed to direct them, that he betrayed me when he got to know you behind my back, that he betrayed you when he agreed to join your city. He said he loathed betraying. Hence he had to leave. He said he loved reality and had to leave. And he left.

(8)

Once again, I was shouting at the children:

"Right! Virtue! Justice!"

Their throats dried up as they repeated these words. Their eyes reddened like embers. They were filled with fear lest I spat on the floor again. The sticky echo of my university professor's laughter filled the room, their faces and the floor. I stamped on it this time forcefully and did not spit. I went on whispering to my children:

"Wipe up your faces and repeat quietly: Right. Virtue. Justice".

July 1982

A New Birth

(1)

Like any other traveler, I had to prepare my suitcase and look for my little things, both the important and unimportant ones, and my books.... etc. etc. and hide them in the case.

I opened my wardrobe, spread my books, piled my small things, scattered them about, collected them with my hand and then threw them. They were scattered and finally settled on the floor like scattered torn pieces. I was happy to see them so.

A moment later, I felt I did not want to pick them up. I did not want to take them with me. I did not want to. Why should one carry a traveling bag to travel? Why?

I decided to travel without one. And so it was.

(2)

The little one turned about when the hotel lounge contained us and the bags piled in front of us. Everyone was looking for his bag to make sure it was beside him. I alone was silent.

- Where is your bag?

I shook my head in the negative. The eyes gazed at me in astonishment. A coarse voice addressed me. It was my father's:

- Where is your bag?

I kept silent, in fear. God forbids! Does anyone like me have fear? But I have great respect for this voice. A respect greater than for myself. Therefore I have to explain:-

- In fact...

But the servant's voice overtook me:

- You may follow me, gentlemen.

I sighed. Thank heavens.

I walked behind them, feeling a strange relief. Relief of the kind I never felt before. I care for nothing, as if I was born again. Nothing makes me think. Nothing. I really wish I was born again. I will give myself another name. What Dania .. Dala .. Dana .. D .. what is the use of names? Why hang to the letter D? Perhaps because it is associated in my mind - imprinted in the sub-conscious, and is coming out.

It reproduces it in the form of names beginning with the letter D. Perhaps. But .. why indeed do I look for another name for me? Why not be without a name? Me, an individual without a name just as I am now without a bag?

(3)

- Won't you go to sleep?
- I will.
- Why don't you bring your bag?
- I have no bag.

My sister sprang.

- Has been lost?
- No.
- Where is it then?
- Haven't brought it from town.
- What?

She opened her mouth in astonishment while I started to undress and carefully folded my clothes and placed them on the wooden chair. I lay on the bed next to my sister's, with a glass table separating us, with a grey coloured telephone of the same colour as the lamp shade the top of which was adorned with golden threads to match with the golden line and grey colour. I ignored her astonishment and whispered to myself:

- Tomorrow, I will not have a name either.

I slipped quietly under the bed sheets while whispering:

- Good night.

(4)

It is early morning, but the sun has not yet risen. I felt strange vigour in my body. I sneaked lightly to the thick curtain that hid the glass barrier. I pulled it aside and opened the glass. Cold air bit me. I covered my bosom with my hand. I enjoyed taking the air. Paris, the playful city was asleep, with grey fog covering it. I am happy with this day because I am without a bag and I will be without a name afterwards.

(5)

My early steps drew the attention of the active receptionist. To see him, one would think he had just begun his work, though he would in fact be relieving his colleague who was standing beside him.

Before my steps reached the door, his hand was faster to open the glass door.

- Good morning, Madam. The city is still asleep. Your steps are the first this morning.

I painted a smile on my face. Cold air received me. I walked .. long, following the right side or the straight road starting from the hotel, but I do not know where it ended, so as not to lose the way on my return. Usually, I hate returning. To walk, yes. But to return is what I cannot bear. I wish I could walk without stop. Why must we return?

Why cannot we just walk and not return to the road we left? Why?

Paris wakes up with my steps going down. Is the hotel up the hill or why is this steepness? The smell of bread filled my nostrils. I stopped in front of the shop. I felt hungry. Hunger bit me fiercely. I have not tasted food since yesterday. I looked at my watch. A long time passed since I started walking, while a strange feeling of happiness filled me, where nobody knows me. Nobody knows my name, or can call me by name, or know my identity or who I am. Yes, I had another feeling .. Hunger. The man gazed at me from behind the glass, where I stayed long. He opened the door and fixed his eyes into mine.

- Are you an Arab?

He said in broken English in a French accent. His eyes were black, his skin brown, not too dark brown, yet not white, but a mixture. His hair thick, inviting to be messed with, though not as soft and thick as my hair.

- Are you hungry? You've stood too long here!

His accent. He is not as good in English as in French. But he is not of French origin, of course, and could be an Arab fleeing from his destiny there.

- You have no money, yet your eyes indicate that you have an oil well.

Money. I searched my pockets for money. I really do not have money. A new feeling took hold of me. I have been freed from something else - money.

Money no longer enslaved me. His grip was tight on my arm:

- Who are you?

His breaths were hot on my face. Paris cold penetrated through my skin. My other hand hit him on his face. His hands flagged. I turned my face away and took forceful steps on the pavement.

He spat behind me and yelled:

- Hungry Arab women! You'll be back. They all do that and at the end kneel under the feet. It is hunger.

Why should I return? Why return? Money. The bag. The clothes. The name. Why belong to one identity only? Or to one country? Or one father? One mother? Why these ties? Why?

They stifle me like chains around my neck. I don't want to belong. I don't want to return.

(6)

I left the right side of the road on which I was first walking. The pavements and wide roads swallowed me. The road was no longer steep. It widened and became straight with branches. The faces walked straight, and the steps faster. I could cry, weep, sing, without anyone turning to me or enquire about the secret of my madness and ask me to stop and return. But hunger tarnishes my happiness and there is another feeling.. Fatigue.

It was afternoon. My feet got tired of their sure steps on the road, and started to pain me. The road. The pavement. The pavement came to an end and I am hungry. The houses here are scattered. There is a wide garden in their vicinity to which my tired steps lead me. The seats are scattered. I occupied one, took off my shoes, rubbed my feet on the grass. It was wet. I threw myself on it and rubbed my face in it. My face, my hair.. and slept. No. I did not sleep. I heard steps whisper. I heard. Hunger. Fatigue. The feeling of joy. Why it slipped away? My mother. Yes. Mother. My father. Yes my father. My brothers and sisters. No.. what brought them here? Why should I spoil my happiness? My mother. My father. The voices around me get less. My mother, brothers and sisters. My father. Fatigue makes sleep on the grass enjoyable .. and .. my father.. and ..

Suddenly.. I woke up. Rustling around me, around my feet. I got frightened. Darkness all around me. Eyes looking at me. It was evening. I closed my eyes once again. I was dreaming. But the return of the eyes in the dark scared me. I rose up. The man standing in front of me scared me. He spoke French, which I do not master. And I do not want to speak.

But it was frightful. Fear filled me. Fear. Fear replaced all other feelings of hunger and fatigue. Fear invaded my moment and held it. Darkness. Fear. Fear shook my twenty three year embedded confidence. I screamed. Mother. Father. Darkness. My brothers and sisters. Darkness. The echo of my scream reverberated all over the extensive park.

Weeping gathered in my chest. I screamed. The darkness. I fear darkness and the eyes in the dark gazing at me.

I want to go back. I ran. I wanted to return. The steps behind me were fast, too. I want to go back. I fear darkness. And the steps behind me. Mama! Papa! I want to go back

And Paris has no straight road that leads to the Hotel. And I am a stranger and hungry and frightened and want to return. I want to belong. I want the fatherland.

November 1981

The Fifth Box

(1)

Prelude

On some scorching evenings and others dry, cold, gloomy and rainy, people send their letters and wait for the seasons of joy.

The first letter.

A barren evening

Killing silence

And a time that came from where I do not know, nor when it would leave.

I am sending you, my son, my last clippings without waiting for your letters and face. Illness has weakened me so much that I crawl on the way to send this message to you. But you hug silence. And I am bitten by pain. And the worms are waiting for my corpse.

(2)

A lead to the event:

The city has five postal boxes. The pale faces accidentally came to unite to put their letters in one box, the fifth, where there is a girl who resembles the coloured sweets toy. The deep wound of the postman opens afresh whenever it tries to heal. He loses his heart beats and memory that there are five boxes in the city. He collects the messages of the four, but the outlines of the fifth blur in his eyes, where he leans on it waiting for a smile of joy or a gesture of acceptance from the occupant in front of the box.

The second message:

Night is another ghost. The evening dozed and my tears and you remain in my memory. When I missed you, I sought for you inside me and missed you even more. Sadness abounds. My father's face is a stern executioner. My wedding will soon take place. Your face is my savior. I have waited so long for your letters till I thought that the postman intentionally steals them because they carry whiffs of your feelings.

The gray colour gives a false impression of love. In our city, love is beleaguered as if it were the plague. You know that.

When are you coming? I miss you terribly. Your cruelty chokes me like brick - coloured copper chains. When I try to break them, their scars remain on my neck.

(3)

The event:

The messages pile up, their senders' faces wither; their words lie at the bottom of the fifth box in waiting and forlornness. The painted toy of sweet is fed up with the postman's loss of consciousness and fleers at his fall in front of her. She decides to move to where there is luxury in the arms of another man full of surfeit and gold. The postman's wound widens till he gouges out his eyes for the loss of his toy. He knocks his head hard against the fifth box where the pending papers piled. His blood mixes with the paint of the white box. He licks his blood, raises his head and sees the fifth box in front of him and becomes dumbfounded.

The third letter:

I hate the lids of the postman who keeps a heap of my letters in his possession.

Gloomy dread fills me.

I want to die.

I have lost the desire to go on living .. waiting for the emergence of my child's face, the dream that is planted inside .. waiting for your reply .. the hope .. to open up the locks of my barrenness.

I beseech your entity and learning, my doctor, to show me the way that leads to the emerging of my child's face so as not to lose my other self that is embodied in the one who would share with me the living and waiting. Because I would like to present him to another who would give him that child when my sterility is confirmed.

(4)

The surprise element:

The postman opens the box. The letters scatter under his feet. He is struck with fright. His wound widens, and his large bag. He collects the letters and they pile inside the bag. He remembers that he has been working for five years now, that he is in love for five years now and that those letters have been there for ..

How tragic!

The fourth letter:

From above a thunderous cloud radiating sound and fury, my father ..

I see hundreds of papers

Hundreds of papers

And long for one of them to reach me.

Who will knock on my door first? The policeman to take me to a dim cell? Or the postman who would bring good tidings that would save my neck from that cell .. with the arrival of your postal remittance of the awaited money, father.

(5)

The moment of enlightenment:

The man's memory wakes up and his conscience howls. He scatters the heaped letters in his barren evening under his dismal seat and around himself. His boss's face floats in the memory. He trembles. He mourns his coloured toy, and decides to burn those letters. He gathers them and the aridness of the words in them, turns them to the wall heater, lights the fire and throws them in. They burn into ashes in the heater.

Then he pulls out other papers and writes an application to his boss for a reward for his diligence and complete attention and commitment to the job.

The fifth letter:

I howl like a wounded wolf and bleed pain. I inter my child with my hand and shed tears. I gather the rest of your love inside me and scatter it in the trails of your eyelids.

So I inform you that the young is trembling in pain and I vanish in dread. You dwell in the distant roads and your presence beside me means rescue from disease and death and from ..

But .. you will not find me when you return.

I, too, have decided to depart to where there are no traces of remains of love for you inside me.

O You husband (the Reality).

Oct. 1983

The Old Oak Tree

(1)

"Fatima ... I'm eaten up by the silence and the suspicious looks in your eyes."

(Pain burst from the artery and swept the estrangement of the village and the lusterless eyes of the children).

Hope recovered inside her. But strong murmurings creep in, and the echo of the calm night drops reflections of the moon on the surface of the sea nearest to the dark structures of the village. The murmurings mingled with the croaking of the gul in the distance. The murmurings got closer. Fatima opened her mouth. Her teeth were like pearly lights on a sailor's copious evening. His hands were faster. He closed her mouth, pulled her to where he was on land to behind the rocky mound, where they took refuge. The murmurings receded and faded out.

He sighed and removed his hands from the gasp inside her, and whispered:

"Fatima!"

[A question popped up. Yesterday's memory floated in her mind and dread settled

"Fatima. Tomorrow I'll tell you everything. Leave quickly now." He uproots joy and sows grief."

She extended her hand despite the darkness, shook him violently and screamed:

"Who? How?"

[She curtailed the question.]

"I beg you Fatima to go back now!".

Her feet were a forest of dread of entangled branches. They got stuck in the wet sands. She forcefully pulled them and tried to drag them. Her eyes full of grief and pain.

Last night's memory stammered in her mind. [His brown face, the avid eyes of strangers as they counted the pearls].

The memory faded out. She hurried; fell on the sandy ground, while he guarded the road.

Her shadows kept following in succession with the moonlight reflections up to the gate of her mud house. She pushed the door to enter and be met by the bodies of her sisters in the mats spread closely by one another under the open sky in the hope of some moist breezes and to escape the biting heat inside. Her mother's voice preceded her:

"All this time visiting your aunt?"

She entered, carried her sleeping mat and placed it on the sandy ground. She stretched herself on it close to the children's bodies where the moon reflections lit her mother's face and the courtyard.

"I'm sorry mother. I didn't find my aunt, so returned slowly.

(2)

She hurried with her brown tresses and skin under the scorching sun, carrying her anguish and the plate towards the infected door at the far end of the village and the palm tree. She knocked on it and walked slowly in. She clasped the old man's hand, put the food in front of him and kept silent. His blind eyes sought her voice in the darkness. With a trembling voice he said:

"Fatima.. Despite the darkness you look to me today like an old oak tree waiting to be pulled down by a roaring wind, or the tongues of a flame or the iron blows of a farmer!"

She whispers : (The dream moment flashes in the memory).

"I'm waiting for the face of the truth behind the rain laden cloud. Once it appears, I blossom again."

(The seabed vanishes and joy is stamped under the threshing floors of the wind.)

The old man howls.

The silence was bitter. And divulgence was a failed suicide attempt. She collected her tresses and yesterday's empty plate and trotted on the searing sands. Her brown skin changed colour with the question in mind. She smelt the sea breeze at a distance.

"Fatima!"

A voice panted behind her. She knew his brown face without turning. She felt him beside her; saw his face that no longer had any colour under the sun, and the blood bond bearing his belonging to her and attachment to her. The village whispered whenever the masts moaned in the damp evenings that (Fatima was his love and future wife.)

He caught up with her:

"I knew you're cross, Fatima. I saw you that night despite the darkness and my worry. But ..."

[The dreaded memory of that evening, floated. The dream dwindled.]

"But ... You won't understand however hard I may try to explain."

[She fell into amazement.]

"So ... You have to forget!"

[Grief dropped into her veins and they bled hatred.]

She got near their mud house gate. She disapproved of her young brother's looks under the sun. She wiped the mote in his eyes with the tip of her dress and raised her face to the one panting behind her.

"But the pearls that were handled by strangers, and your hands on that dark night, were the pieces of the necklace of the dowry of the village wedding which was reported to have been stolen. And no joy will take place in the village since it had disappeared."

[3]

The waves broke on the rudder of the anchored ship. She heard the mast. The rattling whispering of the old man reached her in fits:

"Fatima ... Are you still like an old oak tree?"

[She got enflamed with anger]

"I will not blossom after this day." The old man smiled:

"Your wedding will soon be celebrated."

[The memory of that coming night, crowned with the beat of drums fiercely pierced into her skin.]

"The village distress is my dowry."

The old man shook like a sail torn by the gale and dropped in pieces on the shore, lying on the wet sands, with the waves spraying his lap. He moistened his dress and face and repeated:

"Whenever we plant the seeds of truth, we reap cactus."

She sat beside him on the wet sand:

"The sailors hands are bony, their backs are weary. Breathing under water is tiring, and the number of the coming corpses exceeds the sailing fleet. The crop of their arduous labour is my dowry."

The old man received more spraying in his face and chest. He mumbled as he pushed his emaciated fingers into the sand. He pushed them deeply and pulled out the tail of a fish that had rotted under water. He crushed it with his fingers.

He dwindles.

-Your wedding and the village joy are opposites

[She rages with resolve.]

"The village joy is my dowry!"

The old man dropped out in sadness. He collected what was left of him and roared inwardly.

[You will be pulled out by the wind, the flames or the iron blows of a farmer.]

September 1983

The Siege

The evening is dozing. Drops of rain cluster on the window and slip down densely. The clouds are heavily laden by the storm. This evening is a tile on which I lay the palm and the seat and look at the wall, looking for her face which lies deep in the memory.

The voice beside me whispers, and then gets louder and I hear the hissing storm outside:

- You want to dine?

I rest my head on the palm and the seat, looking for her gipsy hair in the pit of pain which I picked up some day and pulled. She screamed:

"If you don't release the bundle of my braids, I'll hit you."

The voice rises again. The clouds weep outside in rain drops that cling to the window. Their lines slide in bohemian colours into the void.

- Would you like to dine or sleep?

My looks slip and the rain drops on the window. I recall her sadness and whispering:

"Did you like this?"

I hug her childish face and smile:

"I love to see you furious".

The voice beside me shrieks and the wind hisses

"I want to sleep."

The voice fades away and the rain drops dwindle

"Would you like to dine: Nod if you can't speak."

[I smiled. I came closer with my face and whispered:

"Slap me if you want."

Her hand rose and fell on my temple. My face hurt. I thought she was kidding. At the same time, she neared her face and whispered:

"Wawa ... My hair hurt."

She neared her face closer. I plunged into her honey-coloured hazelnut eyes and laughed:

"Slap me again if you wish." She hugged my face:

"I'm sorry. I was really angry."]

I gaze... With the rain drops. I slip from the cushion my palm and the seat, and face the voice:

"I don't want to dine."

The voice stops. The hissing of the storm gets louder. The waves popple inside rises. The voice whispers imploringly:

"Won't you go to sleep?"

I slide down to the ground, and come nearer to the glow of embers in the heater. I stay in the warmth. Get closer. Seek the warmth. I feel a shiver inside me. There is enormous emptiness inside me, an ice cave from behind the walls of which a herd of reindeer moan as they pull their carts over the icy surfaces.

The voice sighs. And the far poppling of the waves.

"I fear the darkness inside. The poppling of the waves and the storm frightens me."

[She was smiling and playing with my hair:

"Wa wa ... I'm no longer angry." I pulled the hanging tresses again. She frowned. I caressed her tiny nose. She smiled once again.

"Wa wa ... I'm no longer angry. But I fear the dark. Let's leave this place." The rain drops sliding on the car window glass, her fingers following the sliding on the inside and she laugh's:

"Can you believe it? When I meet you, the sky sings and rains. Have you noticed that? Smile...

[I love you and the rain drops.]

The wind outside howls and the waves beat the pavement, creep, clasp the doors and recede roaring to the shore. The panting voice gets closer, clings to my face. I feel the breaths on my brow like a shame, stained with blood and shame.

I turn my face away, trying to wipe off the shame from my forehead. The voice attacks again, panting:

- "Won't you go to sleep? I fear entering the room alone."

The sound of the rain frightens me. The cold in me multiplies. The lines interwoven in the foggy picture have not completed two flowing lines. The breaking up of the burning wood in the hearth dwindles. Despite the clinging to me once again, I feel the cold penetrating inside me. There is a huge void and cold corridors inside me.

[Her hazel-nut eyes gape at me:

"I love the rain. Pull the car to a stop on the road. Let us witness the wedding of heaven and earth."

I gazed into her face:

"You are mad. But I love your madness."

She got angry:

"Always afraid."

I pulled her hanging braid:

"Near you. No. Away from you - yes."

The hand and the voice encircle my shoulder. I try to escape. The void inside me howls. The embers die out. The cold invades me.

[Her hazel-nut eyes are sleepless. One evening, she whispered with sadness while looking at the lines on my forehead:

"Do you love her?"

I kept silent, turned my face away from her. She got angry. The waves were caressing the feet of the rocks in that dreamy evening. She pulled me from my napping over the rock.

I sat in front of her. She smiled sweetly:

"Do you love her?"

My fingers invaded her braids:

"Who loves you if I love her?]

I turn the siege away from me and rise heavily with the grief of the world on my cheeks. The moaning and the rest of panting get rusty. I drag my feet on a solid ground.

I slip under the cover. The hands and the face come nearer. I whisper with a rattle in my throat:

"I want to sleep."

The moss of time kills me. It creeps as always every evening over my face and neck, tearing the artery and opening its octopodan sails and extends, gets longer and devours the daybreak. Sleepiness abandons me. I follow the sound of distant barking and the cats mewling after the earth and heaven were cordially embraced and the wind stopped.

[I recall the grief and her warm voice. I want to sleep.

I feel the pain and moaning in its tones. I tease the sadness in her. But I am a naughty child fond of waking up all night. She is deep in silence. She puts down the phone.]

Aridness and the void inside me. The cold creeps, paralyses my limbs. I slip to the ground from under the sheet. I recall the sadness and the bleeding. I feel sick and want to vomit.

The face turns over on the bed and rattles, seeking my physical presence. It screams:

"I'm afraid of the dark. Don't go."

I moan like the wind outside. I feel dry in my throat. I will drink a glass of water."

The hands cling to me:

"Don't go. I'm afraid of the dark."

I gaze at the frightened face in the dark. I gaze and break up like the embers in the hearth.

"Why did you marry me?" The face is silent. The voice rattles.

"I had to. I was thirty and nobody would have married me afterwards."

[Her distant voice that resided in the lobbies of grief bleeds inside. And her thick hair. Love is to kill you in the time of drought and barrenness.]

I gaze into her face, pull the sheet away and roar like the waves outside:

- "Why have you insisted on getting tied to me though I have told you that I love another woman ever since I have known joy?"

The face sighed, tremblingly:

- "That had to be so."

I roar like thunder:

"Isn't there another way for one to enslave another?"

The voice howls:

"Why did you agree? Despite all, you could have refused, but you fear confrontation. You want everything to come to you on golden plates."

[Her distant face springs from the memory shelves and moans.. Love is that I do not kill you in the times of draught and barrenness. Therefore I take leave of you. There is a haven for you in my heart where your ships can rest. I leave you despite your penetration into my being and your infiltration into the pores of my skin, and dozing among my blood corpuscles.]

I slip. My tired memory, my shaky feet, the panting voice behind me and the dead embers in the hearth. The wind resumes moaning, and the waves roar. The dogs and the mewing cats and the void. Dryness quivers on my lips. I wet them with drops of cold water.

I stick my face to the window. The night is pitch black, where the wind, and the waves roister and hard rain falls thick on the window and knocks on it. And the cruelty of separation inside me and the desolateness of her eyes and my assassination on the havens of weakness and hesitation _____ all roar and bleed inside me and run burning drops on my cheeks to embrace the cold and her hazel-nut eyes!

I howl like the wounded wolf inside me. I refuse to be assassinated in the times of delighting in the dignity of man. I look for her face buried in the memory, her white shirt and the slumber of the dream on her eyelids and her sadness that is as deeply set as my wound. I kiss the memory of her face on the windowpane. I decide to travel to her where she is inside me and the joy and her voice which is buried in the depth of sadness. I long for it, and she bleeds in the distance [Love is not to assassinate you in the times of drought and barrenness.]

August 1983

The Innocent

Night stretched itself, with its banners spread over the sky of the sad homeland. The planes dropped the feet and faces of those arriving from different world destinations

The faces enjoyed the smell of home and met in a moment of silence.

The custom's inspector stroked his moustache and belched. He extended a thick hand to stop a tall young man, carrying his only bag over his shoulder and dragging his silence behind him.

He shouted at him:

"Stop!"

The young man turned his face and smiled:

[Believe me; in these times which are infected with tyranny, I know how to stop. I can repeat the mandatory rites and raise my hand above my head, and my foot, too. I can fall on my face and be dragged, if that is part of the pleasure. Believe me. I know how the dagger is planted into the chest up to the marrow, how joy is stifled, how to recall the face of the loved one on a very dark night while leaning on a dark wall, dreaming of a streak of light.]

- "What are you carrying?"

The young man put his bag forward but withdrew it again before the hand of the custom's officer fumbled it. He hugged it as he retreated.

[I am carrying the face of my cross-bred child, his laughs, his black locks and lovely eyes, and an unfinished song of joy. I am carrying the face of the mother of my child and her grief on the pillow, the colour of her tresses wet under the rain, and the whiteness of her skin, and the warmth of her emotions. I am carrying the cruelty of my father and the faces of his women as he counted them at this house and belched, glorifying the abundance of children and money. I am carrying my mother's angry

face which refuses the polygamy of my father, and accuses him of ungratefulness for long time association and leaves him, leaving behind lonely frightened faces under the midday heat of that father, falling down, moaning with the pain of cruelty. I also carry bits of papers and echoes of a memory.]

- "Why don't you answer?"

- "..."

- "Won't you answer? Then, you're accused".

The customs officer's hand extends again. He pulls the bag violently from his chest. The young man clings to it. He falls with it on the ground. He clings to it very strongly. The customs officer shouts again:

- "You are accused. You are accused as long as you keep silent."

[Last time, I was feeling the taste of treason as bitter as colocynth on my lips. The girl with wet tresses stood before me in her white skin under the rain and shouted at me that she had another man. The eyes of our child were asleep, with a sweet smile on his lips. So, I could not slap her or even answer her. The lighting turned red in the frozen soul. I stood fixed before the face of my sleeping child, picking silently on the rims of the bed. Afterwards, I carried my bag and left. I was caught red-handed with grief at one of my home airports. At that time, someone extended a broad palm like this one with which he clasped my arm, dragged me, tottering with my agony, and shouted at me: "Stop! You are accused.]

Something sharp, pointed and cold was pushed to his head. At first he knew that any movement on his part - even if to raise his head to the sky - would be to his end. So, he clung to his bag ferociously while the broad hand struck on his face and threw him on a cold floor in a secluded cold room, while roaring: "Confess ... What are you carrying?"

The young man cowered, clinging ferociously to the bag and refusing to open up. He stumbled on his grief, with his pale eyes hanging over the face of the customs officer, trying to speak but could not.

[Thirty years since I was ejected by my mother's womb and until now ... I have been admitting that the pain was here in my chest and memory.]

I confess that the desertion of my mother of my father planted in me the seedling of loneliness, and that the palm of my step-mother striking my face taught me the meaning of pain. My thirst for the warmth of my mother's bosom made me seek that warmth in the bosoms of all women. I confess that my rupture between many rooms where my mother and father were not present together made me clamorous, hitting children and stealing their toys, and a bohemian creating for myself a world where others are not found, behind the walls of which I scream, sing and drag women into it like my father, though without a marriage certificate. I confess after all this that all the women I have sincerely loved deserted me, and those who loved me, I deserted; that I became as lonely as the dry leaves of the tall palm trees, hugging a musical instrument in the cold winter nights to sing my grief. I scatter the colours compiled inside me on paper and come out with bohemian visions that fill my silent room. I confess that after all I am sad to death.]

There were several bruises on his pale face when he rose from the cold floor and dragged his swollen feet and twisted arm and hugged his bag which was thrown at this face by the customs officer after having searched it and had it searched by his colleagues. He opened the bag as he dragged his feet outside the homeland airport building. He looked into it again. There was a photo of a woman living in the cold cities, hugging the face of a crossbred child with features combining both the heat and the rain. He carried a wonderful face with a beautiful smile. There was a

message lying at the bottom of the bag, and white papers, coloured black pens and a brush. He closed the bag and dragged his skinny frame, while the hoarse voice of the customs officer followed him:

"You. There... You!"

He kept on walking. He did not turn back. The harsh voice kept shouting:

"You are innocent..."

December 1984

The Dream

The corridor was cold and silent except for her broken steps on it. When she felt her heart beating, she contained herself and put her hands into the pocket of the coat as she whispered in a husking voice to him who was standing erect in front of her:

"Salamu Alaikum"

She did not stop to hear the response but felt a hand gently touching her shoulder. Her heart beats were again quickened. She tried to muster the strength to contain herself. Calmly, she turned her head:

- "I ..."

He stood on her way and smiled that smile which she had so often recalled in the evenings and was the last thing she closed her eyes on when she hugged the pillow and dozed off.

He replied:

"Yes. You."

Could it be that God had answered her prayers in her sad evenings? However, she had abandoned those hopes since he refused to marry her because of her father's alcoholism. He had ignored her humanness and sank into himself, muttering:

"But what would people say?"

That community, for the guilt of which she is not responsible... Though she could do nothing about the addiction of her father and could not remove that smile from her inside, she decided to retain that smile in secret and hug his face every evening and sleep. But the dream became a reality despite her profound grief. She found the strength, the confidence and serenity and tried to stand up like a palm tree that would not fall.

His breath, the touch of his tender hand on her shoulder, melted the ice heaped inside her. The flame of longing lit and yearning moaned. He whispered again:

"I want to come back. Would it be possible?"

Silence. She was about to shout the answer and raise her eyes to take in his smile that had so long kept company of her nights. Yet her friend's face popped up in the memory:

[Where is the discretion?]

So, she quietly and silently passed him without replying, and made his pursuing steps look for her. She entered the car, took the seat and vanished.

Alone in the room, she shouted to herself:

"How beautifully the ember of longing lit inside me. How I wished to hug your smile at that moment."

She took up the receiver, and dialed. Hardly had she heard the yawning voice of her friend across the line than she shouted forcefully:

"He's back to me again!"

Her friend kept silent, while she whispered quietly this time:

"Thank you, my God. You've answered my prayer after a long suffering. How I wished to have hugged his smile and to have said yes... yes... a thousand yes. But your face, my friend shone in the memory and I retreated so as not to be shocked by the dream again."

Her friend whispered:

"Put down the receiver. I'll soon be with you."

The two faces met after a long period of waiting, amidst bouquets of flowers, they were seated. She felt no embarrassment when he kept holding her hand the whole evening amidst the family faces surrounding them.

When he whispered the word love in her ears, her face reddened with childish joy until its blood almost shot out. Her heart beat rose.

"What do you wish to do now?"

She said in that husky whisper as she felt that beloved smile:

"To go and pray and thank God for having brought you back to me as a husband."

201989/12/

Wild Grass Bouquet

He was dejected and roaring inside. His trembling fingers as they dug in the sand simple grooves, disturbing the sand and cutting the grass betrayed the turmoil inside him.

He was sad and I was sad, too. I came close to his baby face. The doctor's words were still echoing in my ears:

"Don't approach the patient face to face"

I approached his baby face. The doctor's words quivered in the memory.

I approached his lines on the wet ground, plucked tender grass and neared it to his face. His baby face was strange and I was a stranger. My tutor's words were successive bullets that awakened my memory and sad heart:

[Beware of commiseration. Sometimes personal sentiments interfere with the relation between the specialist and the patient and obstruct the professional development necessary for the case. The specialist himself might find in his patient an extension of a past emotional experience. Or the opposite may happen. This is a failure. So... Beware!]

But...

But how can I prevent my humanness from nearing his baby face?

He shares sadness with me. How can I lose a person who shares with me my daily agony?

I came closer to him, ignoring the warnings and red lights. I did not stop at the red light in the memory. I extended the grass to him. His baby eyes panicked and widened. But I was not afraid. I felt my sadness gathering up, and dissipating, flowing in rivers inside me: I wept. He picked the grass, dug in the sand again, picked another dewy bouquet, handed it to me and wept.

Afterwards, I had to write a detailed report on the condition of my patient and explain his tragedy in the classroom. When my tutor asked me to describe my subject I felt sad and strange.

I opened my bag. The grass bouquet was still mixed with mud and its roots fresh. I gathered them tenderly.

My steps slackened, quickened. Our faces met. My tutor and I. I gave him the bouquet. I whispered in a stammer. My voice rose with the tumult inside me and my patient:

"I cannot dissect the inside of a human being to be a teaching matter and be awarded a degree on it."

I lowered my eyes as I extended the bouquet to my tutor... and wept.

30 August 1984

The Debacle

(1)

It is dawn; the call for prayer penetrates the fog of this silent city and its grief, entering through the drawn curtains to wake up those of light sleep to respond to that call. The grief spread, settled in his heart and memory. He clung to the button of the bed lamp and a remaining will, and swallowed the conflict and sadness inside him.

He dragged his feet after having washed for prayer and sneaked through the gates of his house to where the call came from and took to a corner in the mosque. He was overwhelmed with tears and grief.

(2)

He was aware that the eyes inside besieged him and count his movements. He took his papers under his arm and his grief. The unsatisfied eyes watched him in anguish, piercing his pores up to the spinal cord.

He took the warm glass of milk. The eyes still besieged him. He smiled at them before taking the first warm drops and whispered:

"Good morning".

A hoarse voice citing the savageness of life, shouted:

- "Where are you heading this morning?"

He smiled again, despite the pain:

"To work, my father."

He went on sipping the warm milk quickly. The eyes converged, in astonishment. Irony emerged from them and ran into contained giggling. Another angry voice was echoed:

- To where did you say?

He put the glass of milk and his anger on the tray, put the papers and his anguish under his elbow and went out, facing the voice in whisper and the tears inside him:

- "To work, my brother."

[3]

The light and his fear slipped into the tall building that reached up to the sky. He entered through the iron gate and threw himself into the lift of that ministry where he used to work before he broke down and fell deep into himself. He faced himself for the first time in full in the tall mirror of the lift. He felt his shaven face and his hands and followed his eyes trip across the neat dress and the nice smell on it. He begged for confidence and strength. He smiled. Worry piled up inside him. He opened the lift door. The first look in the eyes of the one waiting for the lift startled him. The man started when he saw him. He stepped back and hurried away without entering the lift. He prayed for confidence while following the panic of the man who ran away from him. He prayed for strength and silently repeated the name of Allah. He went on to where the general manager's office was, ignoring the hurried run of the man. He knocked on the door and went in. He hid himself behind the broad chair, extended his papers and sadness, spreading them on the manager's table. He faced the apprehensive looks of the manager and muttered in anguish trying to raise his voice:

"They are the doctor's certificate and confirmation from the Public Health Headquarters of my recovery and fitness to resume working."

The manager snarled in concealed panic:

"But!"

He prayed for strength and divine mercy, and held out:

"I legally have the right to return to work."

[4]

Lights were shattered inside him. Oppression got coloured, united, mixed. He resisted the fog crawling on him. He tried to win. He wanted the family warmth and conversation, but the eyes ran away from him, and the faces took refuge in the other rooms of the house. He wanted to enjoy conversation. The phone near him rang. He resisted the fog and took up the receiver:

"What took so long to answer?"

He sipped her whispering voice across the air and the rest of the fog crawling to him like drops of a cool spring in a hot evening:

"I am struggling against darkness."

"Have you been back to work?"

"I am struggling against the darkness."

"Have they all met you cordially?"

"I am struggling against the darkness."

"Do they still fear you?"

"I am struggling against the darkness."

"I want to marry you."

"I am struggling..."

She stopped talking as she was honest in her request since she had become aware that a person had a deeper dimension than his physical one.

(5)

The evening roared with harshness and pain. Images fell from the memory in his eyes.

[The offices were empty. The room was empty. The walls were depressing. The feet, the faces, where were they? He looked for his office colleagues, but found none. He opened the door and asked:

"Where have they gone?"

The voice of a workman who liked him and who served them at that ministry answered him:

"They have moved to another office, my son, in fear of you."

Darkness extended its deep greyness into the anguish and wailing. It covered the smooth walls around him. The murmuring and the pale features of the male - nurse indicated the fall into the self.

The memory wailed in anguish and the images took shape:

"Mother! I want to marry her."

"Who?"

"My cousin."

"But?"

"She accepted, mother."

"But?"

"She said that, mother."

An angry voice roared behind him, shook his shoulder and shouted:

"You want to marry whom?"

"Father!"

"Have you forgotten what you are and where you spent the time you were ill?"

"Father ! But the doctor confirmed my recovery."

"Get out of my sight, you lunatic! The psychiatrist confirmed your recovery?"

[7]

He piled up, feeling like a hedgehog - tens of eyes chased him, in grief and raving, and fell into his inner corridors. He piled up more into himself. The nurse's face came near to him, as well as tens of eyes. He clung to the wall, with the wailing and emptiness inside him, howling, howling.

A palm struck his face.

His father's voice thundered in his memory:

"I am not yet mad to wed my brother's daughter to a mad man."

The inside was deep in darkness and horror. Things fell apart inside him. They withdrew... Died... Died... Died.

On his face were traces of the slapping 'wailing'. The strong hands of the nurse tied him to the bed.

March 1984

The Other Face

'To Dr. Kamal Agha of Helwan University to whom I owe the basic idea of this story'.

(1)

From behind the overlapping mirrors I met another face to which I did not belong; residing in another town that I had not trodden before. Its walls were of glass, and its stones of crystal on which my feet slipped and I fell staggering time and again. Nonetheless, my feet had not trodden it before.

I extended a shaky hand trying to arrest these frozen, putrefied features to draw them to where I was staying. Yet another call coming from beyond the fog played with the rosy dreams in my mind, and planted a seed of hope in my arid seasons. I fall back over my other face and weep heaped up grief.

(2)

The faces around me smile in strange schadenfreude. My other face kept staying amongst them, shrouded in despair. It is waiting in silence for eyes to shine, for which it has yearned for so long. Their appearance would be a cool sip to moisten a dry land in need of rain. This silence moves the scene of the beaker's spray that is embedded in the memory, written in letters of fire. My steps are ice blocks clinging to earth and slithering. Staggering, I try hard to step further, and extend a shaky hand to my aunt.

"How are you, my daughter?"

I nodded. My aunt reached out two hands. My other face received hot drops which I felt on its side. My aunt gasped a lot, held me long to her bosom and whispered in sadness:

"I wish you quick recovery, my daughter."

Her hands took leave of my face and body and left my house with her feet. She left the question hanging on my lips, appealing to sadness for a face so long yearned for. [After moving from her embrace, his eyes turned to me directly from the memory. Those eyes I know by heart when their owner gazes at my face and whispers in depth I feel. Your eyes and face are my kingdom in which I revel. I hold your face as sacred as my mother's breast when I was a child. Your eyes are a spring from which I drink warm milk like my mother's.]

Where are his eyes, aunt?

His feet, the feel of his echo, ring drums of grief inside me where once they rang those of joy. My white dress appealed to her lips as well as my eyes that were clouded by the fog of grief, and mourned its being among the other dresses. Its cold existence inside my wardrobe meant a womanhood crumbled under my feet and became a dream enticing my plastered evenings.

[In the memory, the white dress merges into the white sheets and the white bandages. The echo of the roaring voice, wrapped in white from behind his glasses, the doctor approached with a rigid look that meant nothing, to deliver calculated words which I know very well:

"The truth, my daughter, is a reality experienced by the believer. And you are a believing girl who is well aware of what belief in fate and destiny means. It is your fate to be afflicted with these burns. But hope is there as long as a person has the ability to overcome any obstacle.

Today, I listen to the intermittent voices and am led with steps that seem to me to be confident. I envy myself on them. I think I am a moving object following with strange power, the cross words, trying to prove something - the ability to surmount obstacles. But these fixed feet will not pass along these corridors again, carrying as before an attractive face full of hope. But today, they carry another face with which I pass the

joined legs, the laughing roaring eyes and the glass door, to head to the chemistry lab in the college where the echo of words coming from behind the closed door, and the acidic smell stealthily sticking to my clothes before I turned the knob to enter.

My feet lost their steadiness and began quivering. I feel them quivering. I try to stop this shaking inside me, the laboratory .. the smell .. An octopus-like hand extends, presses on my neck from behind the closed door. It strangles me. [The beaker and its boiling spray over my face draws an ugly picture extending its fangs ... screams at me. I tremble and feel its boiling burning on my face. I fall among the girl-students screaming: "My face!.. Save my face .. I do not have any other face but this one.]

The strong smell seeping out of the Lab and my tutor's face appearing from behind the closed door drove the scene out of my mind and brought me back to the reality of my other face. My tutor's broad smile shook me out of my fearful nightmare.

He approached me with a warm face, took my hand in his and whispered sincerely:

"Thank God for your safety."

(4)

"I would like to have a cup of tea". My mother was delighted. My father laughed. My sister sighed in strange relief. This request darted like a gun shot. Joy filled the whole house. My mother wept and embraced my father. He whispered longingly as he turned to me:

"I want you to be always talking and rejoicing."

I feel as if a heavy load was on my chest. I try hard to smile so that joy would fill my house. The strong voice comes to me. I feel it deep inside me.

"My daughter. Would you come with us to your aunt's?"

"I will."

My mother's face changed and threatened with crying. She cast a look full of blame at my father. She jabbed him violently and drew him to the inside, away from my hearing.

I rose to go to my room. I opened my wardrobe to choose a dress for dinner in which to go with my father to my aunt's house.

(5)

I cling to my father's arm in odd fear. I no longer feel my feet. I am flying in another world in which I am not. My eyes were clouded with misty sadness. There is a cascade of tears inside me that I wish to weep out all my life. I know I am deadly weak and frightened. Confrontation in itself kills me. My aunt's face is very sad. I know it very well. I feel her shaking hand. Her words echo like hammers inside me.

"Welcome my daughter. Come in."

This dread that killed her at the moment of my presence which I know she did not expect here at the same time and place where her son is. But it is my destiny. How can I escape it? I have to find a solution to my white dress which is crying for help for my womanhood among the other dresses. Her steps are as shaky as mine. She leads me and my father inside. She bows until she touches the seat. Drops of sweat fall down her skinny forehead. She whispers hoarsely:

"I will call Ahmad."

I cling more to my father's hand. My looks were downcast as I listened to his strong steps on the floor. His steps were scared as mine and his mother's. He extended a trembling hand that almost did not touch mine and withdrew it. He whispered, with straying glances:

"Thank God for your safety."

(6)

My mother uttered trilling cries of joy. She wept and hugged me. She gave the servants money. She asked for flowers to be strewn on the seats and behind them, and for the windows to be opened. She answered the queries of the gaping mouths:

"My daughter will marry her aunt's son. Ahmed came back and asked for her hand ... after the accident."

"My daughter..."

I slipped away before hearing the rest of the story, which I knew very well. Those eyes, of which I dreamt in my sleepless evenings are much nearer now. They will be with me in a house where we shall reside as we have always dreamt. We will have handsome wide-eyed children. We will ... and a thousand will ... have been very very close ..

But..?

My dress will not cry for help from my womanhood any more. It will settle on my body after a few days. Joy bells will expel the drums of grief inside me, and the drums of joy will sound in my house on my wedding day. My fingers will hold his. I will weep on his shoulder and whisper to him:

"I love you as I always have."

But...

He may forget the story of my burnt face and whisper again: [Your face is my kingdom in which I revel. I hold it as sacred as my mother's breast when I was a child.]

But ?

My hands open the wardrobe, bring out the white dress, and drag it on the floor. It crosses the door, the doors and stands in front of my mother haughtily and beautiful. As I had been before.

Quietly, I take the match stick from my father's lap and strike it. I near it to the dress. It is in flames, burning slowly. The eyes are astounded. The dress burns. The mouths scream. The dress burns. It is snatched from my hands and smothered by other hands around it. I whisper in sadness:

"I will not marry, mother. I do not have the face Ahmed knows. He is afraid of my face today, and I am proud of this other face, mother."

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