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**WHEN
THE NIGHT FALLS**

حين يهبط الليل

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SHADOWS

An intense blackness suddenly fell down on me. I was frightened to death, and things around were all motionless. My eyes were aiming at all directions. I looked more troubled than a terrified cat. At first blush, I could not tell whether the light had fled only my house or, moreover, the whole neighborhood. I had to take some brave steps to the window and unveil it. Outside, darkness was restlessly spreading. I felt a catastrophe had just taken place. I was alone. Very hard it was on me.

Carefully, I started towards the kitchen. My hands were searching for the wall, and my feet were going too slowly on the floor. I was not afraid that I might hit upon something which I could accidentally break or be, myself, hurt by. But I fancied that a ghost, at least, would show up and start toying with me at its discretion. I set myself annoyed, thus, with nothing but the simple question of why ghosts would appear only in the dark.

Fear was more forcing me on. The kitchen was drowning deep in darkness. Nothing I

could hear but the noise of vessels when my hand would run against some of them. "Where can the box of matches be?! Damn! It is hard to me to see things in the light. How can I see them in the dark?!" I sincerely thanked God for being still able to think. I thought of calling my neighbor through the kitchen window. But I simply did not. He would know that I was frightened and might, therefore, laugh at me in his secret. He might do that openly when the light would spread through each part of the house and remind me of what I could have committed. "Oh! The telephone! If I can just reach it in its distant world, the bedroom, I will soon ask them to come back. I can easily fabricate an excuse to let them do." The idea was only seconds of age. "The clock! But I do not think I may remember a single number of. I wonder if I will be able to keep waiting for them in this dark!"

My hand was still encroaching upon things everywhere in search of the box of matches. Sticky things, which I did not try to get at their fact, sometimes blocked its way. Pleasant, cool water! I left my fingers in.

I lighted one matchstick; another; I started searching for the candles. I found them and soon lighted one. Carefully, I carried it to the sitting room. I set it before the television screen to gain more light. I sat down. I was exhausted. I tried to assume the smile of someone afraid of the dark. "When the house will suddenly be filled with light, I will grin from ear to ear and admit I have been a fool. I will admit that I am even more than a fool if only the light comes! If they were here, I would very much laugh, and the whole matter would look a kind of change. But I am alone!" I went closer to the candle. Maybe I felt cold. It was about to fall down. I looked at the wall while I was stabilizing it. The shadow of my hand, which seemed to be picturing a strange animal, was huge. I recalled childhood nights. We used to gather around the candles when the light was off and make many shapes with our fingers and watch them forming on the walls: strange animals, ghosts and trees. We would issue uncommon sounds to give the impression that they were made by those shadows. And

we would all laugh, knowing that we were inviting laughter.

I do not know why I started to move my hand and watch its shadows play on the wall. Sometimes, I could not determine the shapes. At other times, they looked to me like trees, clouds and animals. But most of the time, they were taking the form of horrible ghosts. It was no pleasure to me. I was afraid. Maybe it was an innocent fear, but it was possessing me. I took my hand back and hid it. But it was only moments later when I felt, somehow, that I liked to free it. I moved my thumb forward. I hid my index finger and set the others half bent. I looked at the wall the time I started moving them slowly. Their shadows frightened me— a dog springing from the middle of the wall with its tongue aiming at me. "Why are they so late?! When can the light be back?! I am very thirsty. I can stay no longer!" The dog was barking at me. Other shadows were impudently laughing and laughing. I hid my hand again. But they were getting bigger! They were freeing themselves and getting at me! Immediately I reached the candle and

strongly blew it out. Back to the heart of darkness! The dog became dumb, and the shadows were gone. I took a deep breath, and I sat waiting quietly for something to happen.

WHEN THE NIGHT FALLS

Thirty two years of her age have run out with the arrival of last night. Twelve years before, she had a very pleasant birthday with her family and friends. They were showering her with congratulations and kisses coupled with two wishes – graduation and arrival of the man of her dreams.

The first came true at the age of twenty five. The second is still clearly stumbling. Three men so far have asked her hand. The first was in easy circumstances, but he was fat, stupid and arrogant. The second had the same job as hers, but he was given up to bars. The third was a soldier. She loved him,

but she felt he would bring home the laws of his army.

Her thirtieth birthday was not celebrated as Baghdad was standing in the heart of deep blackness with painful screams and horrible missile attacks. The thirty-second one was last night. A stormy night it was with heavy rain, thunder and fiery lightning that strongly broke the dark sky. The candles, costing only fifteen Dinars, were of a bad national quality. Pleading a terrible headache, she had the chance to be alone with herself though everybody in the house had early sought shelter in their beds!

She let the curtains down. She lit a candle and fixed it opposite the wardrobe mirror. She took her clothes off and slowly began turning around herself several times, inspecting the garden of her body for the first time in her life. Appalled she was at the sight of the fruits clearly and terribly wasting. Perhaps the damage had started months or years before without her noticing that. Immediately she did her hair and adorned her face. She put out the candle and pulled away the curtains. She opened the window at the

angry nature and stood begging for anything that might be called a man!...

A BULLET

He still rudely carries the heavy war-equipment sack everyday since the winter of 1990. His military boots, once very solid, are worn out now. He protects his feet, thus, with pieces of cartoon against the roughness of pavements and squares he hurriedly walks at. The remarkable thing about this soldier is that he still eagerly does the duty of carrying the sacks and going about transport squares. And each time he finds himself on the point of getting into one of the cars going to the north, middle or south, he changes his mind at the last moment and takes the opposite direction.

Rarely had lorries stopped taking soldiers to the battle fronts! When something of the sort happened, he would get back to his favored kingdom, Sahat Al-Maidan. He rejects help

from any person and refuses to talk or sit down. He allows women no presence in his mind.

Despite his awful appearance, I have the courage, one time, to talk to him. "Oh brother, it is time for you to retire, isn't it? War has come to its end," say I very compassionately. Firmly he studies my face, and he shakes his head which is covered with dust. He seems to be saying, "What a simple head!"

One other time, he gently lays his stony hand on the head of a child crying. The child eyes him with growing fear. But the soldier smiles his fear away. His first and last smile it turns to be! He closes the little hand strongly, then, on something. The child inspects that thing and smiles. In the square, the man is seen no more.

HEART OF ANXIETY

Abdol-Baset leant on his bed for a while after he had inserted his feet into his shoes. He moved out, then, to the courtyard where he suffered late night biting cold. He trembled and rose up his troubled head. Stars were fading. His eyes rested on the dark horizon where black clouds were crowding. Threatening with a melancholic and rainy day, they added much to the burden his heart was already sinking under. He had been uneasy for days.

Why does it happen that one finds himself, sometimes, clinging to a certain thought in whose light he starts to see everything! Abdo could pursue the right course no longer. It was the first time he found himself in a desert of real loss and anxiety. Confusion was flooding his soul like those united, black clouds which were attacking the sky. Snakes of doubt were cruelly biting his blind heart!

He was lost in thought. Some rattle brought him back to consciousness of things around. Lending his ear, he took a step ahead. Answered by nothing he was but awful silence. He was alarmed by raging thunder

after the dark had just been broken, for seconds, by a sudden lightning.

May evil befall Hassan! It was he who had disseminated the seeds of suspicion in his heart with his strange views. He always pretended that he had a comprehensive knowledge of everything, especially people's circumstances.

"Don't trust any woman, Abdo," was a saying he never got tired of repeating. That would never be on abdo's mind, as he was aware of Hassan's extravagant beliefs, just if Ro'a was not involved. She was soft as silk, white as milk, gentle like a breath of air, and shy like a sunflower at night. He knew her since she was a little child. Of chastity beyond any doubt she was. He knew that well. She was the daughter of Om Badr, their neighbor.

Again came lightning to pick him up from the turbid water of his thought. He expected thunder to rumble soon after, but it preferred, apparently, not to do. So, he was back to his reminiscences.

Ro'a grew up and became the most beautiful in the quarter. He started to always follow

her unconsciously. He was bearing no ill will. That was clear to her. Frequently, she answered his eyes with a sweet smile. Many times they met on her way back from school, and he always accompanied her on the strength of being neighbors. They were always deep in normal conversations. But he dared not let her in on his feelings towards her though his eyes were openly speaking of. At that, she was satisfied.

At last, he decided to do. But he thought it would be proper, first, to ask Hassan's advice, his life friend. But Hassan started to ridicule and fill him with doubt concerning his love. And he regarded that her conduct was only part of friendly relations neighbors would usually show to each other.

"You fool, she is playing with you! Indeed, she loves another guy," said he, nodding to confirm his information.

Abdo got madly excited. Hassan succeeded in shaking his certainty of his heart although he provided no evidence. Doubt beset him, and he came to believe, at last, that she was really playing him false.

For days, he had been weary. He stopped meeting her and lost, thus, the only hope that was flavoring his life. Since then, she did not see him but only the day before on her way back from school. He pretended to have not noticed her. But he could not but feel the presence of some questions in her astonished eyes. Slumber fled his eyes that night as it had been doing nights before. A sound at the back of the house came to his hearing. He came to consciousness and collected some of his scattered powers. Slowly he walked. Dawn was lightly touching the dark with its grey color. A cat, of an absent mind as he was, suddenly sprang.

He took a deep breath. He was about to walk back when his eyes fell on a phantom-like body attired in black. A sweet voice, common to him, like that of a singing nightingale played on his ear, "Abdol Baset! Oh Abdol Baset!" His heart went faster. Before his eyes, the moon-like face was overcoming the gloomy night! He stood fighting his suspicions!

To hell with Hassan! How could he upset his faith in her purity and sincerity! He shook

the wicked thoughts far off his troubled head
into the world of nothingness. And with a
loving heart, he hastened to her...

THE KINGDOM OF SILENCE

There she lies, with no tombstone hoisted to
embrace any branch of myrtle, as if she lived
with no name or face. She is known to no
mortal. But who has then placed in the
crumbly soil that etui for those flowers
which nobody has dared to put in!?

Visitors have adorned the graveyard on the
feast day morning with bunches of myrtle
and primrose. Some hold newly-sprung
white and pink lilies. At the back of
transparent curtains, the dead watch faces
that are unable to hide false grief. They
notice how much they are jealous of them for
being burdened with agonies of life no more.
They follow a dialogue in which they are no
party, between the visitors and the tombs.

Had they been one, the dead would have said to the visitors, "When you were leading a life of plenty and opulence, you did not deem us fortunate for being dead. You wish we were back the time you have left for us no plot of land or even a tree to cast a shadow and the time you have falsified truths. Could you estimate the losses you would suffer if we were back to life? Beware of tempting us with emotions we are enslaved by no longer." Blame, anger and grief are great actors on the stage of silence. The visitors leave back to celebrate and wish relatives and friends a merry feast, where candies and meals are very special for the occasion.

The dead are not used to roving on the feast days until the visitors have departed and gates closed. But early in the evening, they go out and contemplate their own kingdom adorned with myrtles, flowers and sweet basil. They re-allot what the visitors have unfairly allotted. They take off some branches of myrtle from a cloyed tombstone to another one given little. They carry flowers to the tombs of the poor and the young and water them.

She is not yet familiar to such morals. She sets about to enjoy what she enjoyed most in life, oh the evening. In the wake of a hot day, she opens the door of the hall and gets into the courtyard. She ladles water with a bucket from the basin and pours it on white and black stones. She feels the hot air shooting up from the ground. The weather then turns humid to introduce, rather, a soft fresh air. She pours out water on the plants lined up around the house, on the lemon tree, and the violets flowerpot. The fountain is bursting into joy, and she finds herself moving in a circle.

What are you doing? Has the heat driven you out of your senses? Is it rather the evening or the water!?

The words coming from her mother strike her ear while watering the trees on that lovely spring day. She washes her hands with drizzle. She raises her head. The sky is blue. The heat tones down. Nature recovers its splendor. Oh, what an evening! It brings life back to the town. But why have they then driven her out at that favorite time of day?!

She hears her mother's "Zahra, bring coffee"!

She carries the vessel in, to the guests, with the coffee and spice ground moments before, exhaling a pleasant odor. Women of different ages with heads veiled are the guests. Zahra is aware of the fact that the visitors are there just to win a treasure for a young would-be bridegroom. She stands before them, with her coffee, just to please her mother.

What drove my brother so insane to commit that?! Was I to blame? Why was he always nervous? Was it because he stood jobless for years!?

He used to pamper me, bring me candy and clothes, seat me in the feast swing, buy me school requirements, and pen my name on white squares...

She has arrived in the kingdom of Silence shortly before the feast time. She still fingers her neck and feels the pain. She still wonders who has placed that etui in the soil.

Alone she is walking. A young man comes closer. She trembles and tries to move away, but he interrupts her with "Forgive me".

Can forgiveness correct what has gone wrong and bring back that evening concluding a hot day? Shall home, flowers, and trees be back?! Can the lost paradise be lost no more!?

Had he realized the insanity of her brother, he would have asked her hand without delay. He still follows her. To console her?! But there is no room for consolation in this kingdom. Suddenly, the question of how he can be there and why he is attired in white like all other inhabitants springs to her mind. He was the same age as her brother and his closest friend. The second started looking for a job and the first bought a small car and penned ‘Zahra’ on and decorated it with flowers she loved. He was not entitled to commit any of the sort. Her brother got madly excited. What to say! Was it a name of another victim and not hers? Did he underestimate the matter and never imagine it would enrage the sleeping monster in his friend to end her days!?

She recalls the news that went on in the town about a young man killing his sister just because someone had written her name on

his car. She feels her slit throat with the palm of her hand. It is not my brother that is cruel, but life. She turns to the man and tells him he was guilty, too, for writing her name on his car and decorating it with flowers she loved.

He follows her without saying a word. She is aware now that he is in the Kingdom of Silence exactly like her. Then he is the one who has placed that etui in the crumbly soil! The day she was murdered, he erased what he had written and removed the flowers decorating his car. He picked, instead, other flowers still alive and united them with red ribbons and went to the graveyard. He found no tombstone to embrace his myrtles, so he reached the etui and placed it in the crumbly soil.

I was kneeling down to put the flowers in, but I could not do that as your brother granted me no respite.

She turns and wipes off her tears, with "Nevermore"...

GATHERED EXPERIENCE

1- Hypocrisy:

All employees had laughed when the new manager told them a joke. But none of them did when he, later, told another one after being discharged from his office.

2- The poor man:

One of his friends informed him that the door of his house had been broken. Hurrying back, he remembered that nothing inside was worth the trouble of robbing!

3- False love:

Frequently she had talked about her love, sincerity and willingness to live with him under any circumstances. At the first financial straits he suffered, she dissolved her engagement.

4- A phantom:

Far he looked! Something shining dazzled his eyes. He thought it was a piece of gold which might help him settle his increasing debts and get out of his straitened circumstances. When he came closer, it was

nothing but a phantom! He came back very disappointed....

5- Lottery:

He took a first in a lottery drawing. He bought a palace and used servants in. He married another woman. But when he got up in the morning, he knew he was late for work because of a dream which will never come true!....

6- Sad reminiscence:

With its beauty, spring comes. Eyes are pleased, and in hearts, love does grow. One evening, he gets into his room after a weary journey. Clothes and books are scattered all over; even vases look empty. Boredom invades him, and he rushes out to the nearest coffee shop. He orders a cup of coffee. As soon as he starts drinking, a song comes to his hearing and awakens a sleeping past. He remembers his young dream. His heart was beating faster the first time he was alone with her. He wonders what has brought her to his mind now. He thinks for moments before he takes a big sip of his coffee. Back to his reminiscence!

Far away, she is contemplating the fascinating stars at the same time. The past, with all its grief, is before her. She remembers the man she loved and the cruelty of days which divided them. She recalls the beauty departing with her past. Being past sixty, she starts uniting the remnants of that past lost in her memory.

7- Rosy dreams:

My friend has unthinkable ideas. Sometimes, he believes that he is a great poet; at other times, a well-known politician. He lives up to that for a period of time before his eyes are opened back on a wearisome life. He remembers that he is a simple man and knows, after that, that he has been very silly. Despite that, he is lost now in dreaming. And he is getting sillier.

8- Imprisoned birds:

He is very kind to animals. Very grievous it is for him to see a cat trampled down by the wheels of a careless driver's car. And he even utters imprecations against the wrongdoer. What agonizes him more is those colored

birds inside cages crying to be freed. He even thought, one time, of buying all of them and setting them free. But it is no use! They will surely be hunted again and sent back to their prison!...

9- Two travelers on the road:

Very homesick he was when he came back. From the airport, he took the bus going to his town. A beautiful girl sat beside him. He thought that she belonged to the same town. He started talking to her as he felt the need to talk to someone. They talked about how hard living away from homeland was. The conversation lasted long and the distance was going shorter and shorter. At the last stop, each went his own way. But he remembered, after that, that he forgot to ask her about her name.

10- Premeditation:

Early he got up to avoid the manager's yells at him because of frequently being late for job. Still, he missed the first autobus. He had to wait! He wondered what he could do if the manager would reprimand him as usual. In the depth of his heart, he was saying, "I will

not let him scream at me this time. I will stop him. I will resign. I will"...

In less than five minutes came the second autobus to which he hurried. An hour later, he reached the stop from which he could get to the place of his work. But unfortunately, he was five minutes late. The only bus had left! So, he had to catch any other one that might take him, somehow, closer. Arriving late was, at least, not as bad as being absent! He started walking; some times, he stopped for some rest. Meanwhile, he never stopped expecting any car whatever. At last, he reached, but after working hours had passed!...

VIEWS

(1)

He was repairing a window that he had closed a month, perhaps a centaury, before. Outside, nothing would attract him any longer. Everything had changed. He woke up. The window was set open, and the tree

was no more. The lady at the opposite window was lost the moment she closed it, or so he fancied. The street looked empty except of some shadows rushing in different directions. He kept sitting behind the window. He had left it open all night. He decided to close it in the morning. He shut it firmly inside, and he covered the outside part, then, with a tin sheet. That was a month, perhaps a centaur, ago.

He woke up a month-perhaps a centaur or centauries-later. He could hardly remember anything. He set the window open. At the tin sheet, he started to regain consciousness!

Repairing it! He painted the opposite window. He left the body he used to see, before, in the same corner. The face! He let it as beautiful as it always looked. But he looked back at it, sometimes, while he was busy with other parts of the painting. Very gloomy and troubled he found it. He endeavored to know the adversary that was violating his joy, but he could not. Showing the teeth, he made the mouth smiling. Still, the face was gloomy. Again he painted it, but

the smile was disappearing. He wiped it out entirely. He tried to paint another thing. The paintbrush looked aimless! He was convinced, at last, that his memory was ill. Totally, he painted the tin with white and started making holes in it through which he could easily see things outside.

(2)

Alone he found himself, in a dirty room, surrounded by four walls and a shut door after the noise of doors and feet going away had died down. Dry urine spots were spreading on the concrete floor. Words, names, drawing, dates and wide lines were engraved on the walls as reminiscences.

Before doing anything, he reached a nail he noticed in one of the corners and made with it a large window on the wall. It was closed. He stopped and thought, "I will open it in the morning." He threw the nail back.

(3)

He was searching for his feet to get up. Under the end of my blanket, I was carefully watching him. Daily he did that, but he never

felt the presence of someone watching him. He sat up and took the blanket off his withering body. He went on searching in the heart of the dark which was penetrated with some rays stealing inside through a narrow, rectangular aperture on an iron door always shut.

Around him, bodies were disorderly scattered, and in the middle of the room, heads came close to each other. In summer, we used to move our heads towards the line connecting the only window, in the wall that stood opposite the door, with the useless, narrow aperture. We wanted to escape the hell coming from the walls, hoping to meet some breaths of air that might, stealthily, get inside any time guarding would be shifted. He still couldn't find his feet. I was searching with him without letting him notice me. The blind man in the corner was snoring as usual. His big belly was monotonously rising and falling. Alone, it could make you feel the presence of its owner. The rest of bodies were wasting under their heavy blankets.

Depending on no feet this time, he flew to the east lonely window. He clung to it. Outside, night was departing. He shaded his eyes with the palm of his hand and started looking outside through the window. Each morning, he used to issue welcome shouts for troops he imagined advancing from the east and taking him to lighted cities where he would breathe the air of life and suffer no more the punches of the guard always targeting his head even when he relieved nature. But he remained silent this time until the horizon turned blood-red. He flew back to his bed where he was swallowed up in his ragged blankets. He had wavered for moments before he completely stopped! The rest of bodies started to move. He was at rest! The blind man in the corner was still snoring, as usual.

THE JOY OF LIFE

Abdol-Kareem was never so desperate! Unexpectedly, his old friend came with his wife. The two friends spent the night traveling into the realm of the past. Unconsciously, he let his friend in on all hardships and worries of his life. He always liked being alone with his sorrow and grief, giving life to and housing them in his heart. He tried to convince him with that, basing his point of view on the fact that some people would like, sometimes, to exercise their hobbies alone. His wife came in with tea. She sat, then, beside the female guest, talking and eavesdropping.

Outside, rain kept pouring down, and the air was very cold. The guest never stopped trying to let the host uncover all of what was in his heart. Abdol-Kareem talked a lot about the sun that had set and the moon lost in the crowding clouds. He talked about sorrow, disease, increasing debts and requirements of hard life. The visitor had already known most of his friend's secrets. Their concerns and pains were not different. So, it was not hard for the first to discover what was left unknown about the second.

"I was leading a happy life," said Abdolkareem. "I had a good job, money, friends and love. But three years ago, things started to go upside down. I can't tell why! My share of happiness became as sufficient as a drop of water for a very thirsty man in a lifeless desert. And things are going worse..." Suddenly, his wife rebelliously stood up, attacking him with very blaming eyes, and she left the room.

He talked far into the night. The guests took leave, and he was left alone at the top of despair. Things went worse with him, and he felt that time was passing with very slow legs and burdening him with all miseries of the world. Strongly, he believed that he was destined to be wretched. He was lost in the darkness of his thoughts. With the increasing length of night, his memory was getting strongly fettered. Very sick he was! For a moment, he felt that he had committed a mistake that night. What was that! He was completely unable to think! He was in an urgent need for someone to relieve him. His wife surprised him with a cup of coffee. She wiped off a tear, trying to let him not notice

it. He thought that a new problem had appeared. He tried to know if anything was going wrong. She said nothing. But when he angrily insisted, she trembled and started weeping passionately.

"True it is that I am not educated, but I can understand anything you say," she started. "You always hurt my feelings when your relatives and friends are present. I feel that your words are addressed in specific to me. Things have been going wrong and misery has never departed you since you married me, as you always say. I wonder what wrong I have committed! Didn't you want children? God has granted you three of them better than all treasures of the world".

He was deeply affected by her words. She kept, affectionately, protesting and weeping. He tried to explain that what he meant was bad circumstances and poor health he was suffering and not comparing the situation, going bad after marriage, with what it was like before. He stopped. In his mind, he started a quick comparison between the two situations. It was true he was in very bad

circumstances, but God had granted him the best in life – his children!

Her passionate tears opened his eyes, by and by, on a different light. He started to swim in the limited world of his thought. His pale face shone, at last, with a smile. From the bottom of her heart rose a scream, "Free yourself of me forever if I am the source of your misery!" Suddenly, words melted into silence, and agony was fiddling with her trembling lips. Quietly, he asked her to leave him alone the rest of the night.

Things were fading, but one picture remained. It occupied his memory and conquered his loneliness. His family, the smile on the faces of his children when he got back home and the word "papa" coming from their mouths were all the real gifts of God. He had never known before that moment how valuable they were.

One has to acclimate himself with his circumstances. He may feel that he owns the world when he takes his enfant into his bosom and has fun with. Real life is there then. So easy it is! How could Abdol-Kareem not feel, before, the happiness he

was living now! Why did he not think of God spreading the roots of life and blessing for him!

He never meant to hurt her feelings. He was only expressing the misery he was in, feeling not the pleasure of being at home and the lovely noise of the kids. The thought of always being miserable and tired had overshadowed his eyes, masked his happiness and left him in a desert of loss. In a moment, free of all of that, he could see that children were the real consolation for sad hearts. He felt that he was in the prime of youth again! He let his eyes run over the faces put to sleep. He kissed them one by one and quietly walked to the bedroom where his wife was waiting for him. And with a smile, he whispered in her ear, "From the bottom of my heart, I confess that you have never been but a real and honest companion to me along the road of this life. You have killed my loneliness and enlightened my spirit"...

THE OLIVE TREE

Like a deadly poison for him it was; he grasped its very essence, and he had, though, to take it. It appeared like an end which could be postponed or which was impossible no longer, but sure instead. As if night with all its secrets, cruelty and sighs was burdening his heart, taking his breath away and turning him to a crushed, lifeless thing. Like a man going crazy, he became aware of nothing of what he was saying or doing. Time stopped, and life came to an end. He felt all that while he was listening to her refusing to marry him. Her tongue was frozen, and words were thrown dead on. Her features were telling things and suppressing others. He felt as if she was slaughtering him and, before he might die, curing him. He was thrown very thirsty for her voice which was dripping into sighs filling her mouth.

Honesty was the sun lighting the sky of her life. It was the most sacred word that always colored the course of their happy, gone days. "For long years, you have been living with injuries, expectations and agony. I am the

one who will wait this time. I will wait for you for ten years, twenty or more," said he, expecting that she would sanction his plan as he had sanctioned her patience before. "We are at one in grief and pleasure. Why don't we be so in waiting"?

She said nothing.

"Don't you remember the blessed Olive Tree? So deep its roots were"...

"Very sad she was when birds deserted her," said she, breaking her silence at last. "Their nests were always in her loving bosom. Spontaneous smiles of children playing around her with their clothes wet were part of her beauty. A symbol of hope she was"!

"One day," she resumed after moments of silence, "trees decided, in a large garden, to announce the Palm Tree as their queen". She refused and said, "Who will then please the mouths used to bitterness"!?

They chose, then, the Strawberry Tree who also refused. She said, "What can the children eat after they finish playing in my shade"!?

Now they asked the Fig Tree. She answered, "I'm a blessed and pleasant tree in all

seasons. I never want to be dull." So did the Orange Tree, the Apple Tree...

"No tree accepted to be the queen?" asked he.

"Only the Olive Tree did on the condition that all trees must be shaded by her, being their only queen".

"She is a world of beauty and life," said he.

"She is the joy of children, the pleasure of lovers and the dwelling of birds".

Having done the most he could do to make her change her mind, he started to be convinced that losing her was an unavoidable destiny with which he could do nothing. And with a burdened heart, thus, he decided to leave her forever.

"But you were born among these sacred trees," protested she, deeply touched by his decision. "They live in our hearts. How will you leave them"!

The sun was in the centre of the sky, and the weather was very fine. He took her hands in his, and they walked, then, among the trees, smelling their very pleasant scent.

THEY DO NOT LIKE THE SEA

Evening had quietly come down, and night crept after. All eyes closed, and alone I kept awake, endeavoring to see a purpose of my life. The horrible shadow of death clouded my soul. I was possessed, then, by a strange mood in which I started to let out incomprehensible, disordered words. But after that, I felt grief parted me, and I reached my pen and started writing about a childhood left far behind.

Henna, a nine-year-old girl, was jumping before me like a colorful butterfly. She wished to be a doctor to cure people. "I will not take money from patients," said she. I laughed and said in my secret, "Then you will starve to death." "Buy you something?" returned she. How did she know I had no single penny!

"On the condition that you go out with me the day after tomorrow," answered I, hoping

that I might be able to get money for a trip around the city.

Her blue eyes made me feel how vast the world was unlike my own world which was as little as a badly made box of matches. We had strawberry juice, and she went home after that. Suddenly, I was full of hope. What a wonderful child! But why were my powers scattered! Which hands wove my fate? Why am I so miserable! For long I loathed life and felt its futility. Henna would grow up. Let her dream! I would help her. Damn! I could not even help myself. Suddenly I decided to end my days! I threw myself into the open sea. But a colorful fish snatched me up and stroke me with her beautiful tail. I noticed something unusual about her. It appeared to me that she could talk like us. "Another crazy one," said she. "I will never allow you to die in my kingdom".

She was big enough to drag me ashore. I showed a very weak resistance, but I was in a full ecstasy! I felt that my body was melting in the heat of a fascinating lady or mermaid. She wanted to leave. I stopped her with, "Where are you going"?

"Back to my kingdom," was here answer.

I said, "Who gave you the right to toy with my fate? If it was not for you, I would be now in another world of much more beauty and purity".

"You fool, that who is not able to live in this world will never be able to do in the hereafter," said she.

"Take me to your world then. It's a middle ground.

"You will not be able to live in a world not yours".

"I want to die"!

"Why"!?

"Very cruel and deceptive life is. I can stand it no longer".

"Find a wife then! Women were created to help men live".

And like a lightning, she disappeared.

At home, everything was irksome. Books were piled up, and remnants of cigarettes were thrown everywhere. Henna had left. That made things worse. Silence was there once more. Dark winds of night arose my fear, and fire of sleeplessness consumed me. Oh godess of seas, save me! Quench my

thirst! Deprived I am of all beautiful and sacred things. Let her be pleased with me!
She is my life...

She jumped to my bed. Her childish hand gently went on my forehead. For the first time, I noticed white about her colorful body. About to fly she was when she said, "They will never overcome you. They will never be happy. Do you know why? Because they do not like the sea." She started rising. I clung to the end of her dress and screamed, "Don't leave me an easy prey for them! "She laughed and kept rising. I was hanging on behind. A world of innocence was before me.

الثقافة بالمجان

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Naji Naaman

WHEN THE NIGHT FALLS

حين يهبط الليل

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