



Tuesday and the Weather is Clear

Mahmoud Darwish

Translation by Fady Joudah

Tuesday, clear weather, I walk on a side road
covered by a ceiling of chestnut trees, I walk lightly
as if I have evaporated from my body, as if I have
a meeting with one of the poems. Distracted,
I look at my watch and flip through the pages
of faraway clouds in which the sky inscribes
higher notions. I turn matters of my heart over
to walnut trees: vacancies, without electricity,
like a small hut on a seashore. Faster, slower, faster
I walk. I stare at the billboards on either side
but don't memorize the words. I hum
a slow melody as the unemployed do:

 "The river runs like a colt to his fate / the sea, and the birds
 snatch seeds from the shoulder of the river."

I obsess and whisper to myself: Live
your tomorrow now. No matter how long you live you won't
reach tomorrow ... tomorrow has no land ... and dream
slowly ... no matter how often you dream you'll realize
the butterfly didn't burn to illuminate you.

Light-footed I walk and look around me
hoping to see a simile between the adjectives of my self
and the willows of this space. But I discern
nothing that points to me.

 If the canary doesn't sing
 to you, my friend ... know that
 you are the warden of your prison,
 if the canary doesn't sing to you.

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There is no land as narrow as a pot for roses
like your land ... and no land as wide
as a book like your land ... and your vision
is your exile in a world where shadow
has no identity or gravity.

You walk as if you were another.

If I could speak to anyone
on the road I would say: My privacy is what
doesn't lead to me, and it isn't a dream
of death. If I could speak to a woman
on the road I would say: My privacy doesn't
draw attention: some calcified arteries
in the feet, that's all, so walk
gently with me as a cloud walks:
"Neither linger ... nor hurry ..."

If I could speak to the ghost of death
behind the dahlia fence, I would say: We were born
together as twins, my brother, my murderer,
my road engineer on this earth ... this earth
is my mother and yours, so drop your weapon.

And if I could speak to love, after lunch,
I would say: We were the panting of two hands
over the lint of words, when we were young,
we were the fainting of words on two knees.
And you were with few features, many

movements, and clearer: your face an angel's
face waking from sleep, your body
ram-strong like a fever. And you used to be called
what you were, "Love," and we
would swoon with night.

I walk lightly and grow older by ten minutes,
by twenty, sixty, I walk and life diminishes
in me gently as a slight cough does.
I think: What if I lingered, what
if I stopped? Would I stop time?
Would I bewilder death? I mock the notion
and ask myself: Where do you walk to
composed like an ostrich? I walk
as if life is about to amend its shortcomings.
And I don't look behind, for I can't return
to anything, and I can't masquerade as another.

If I could speak to the Lord I would say:
God! Why have you forsaken me?
I am only your shadow's shadow on earth,
how could you let me fall into the trap of questions:
why the mosquito, O God?

I walk without a rendezvous, vacant
of my tomorrow's promises. I remember that I forgot,
and I forget as I remember:

I forget a raven on an olive branch
and remember an oil stain on my pants.

I forget the gazelle's call to his mate
and remember the ant line on the sand.

I forget my longing for a star that has fallen from my hand
and remember the fur of a fox.

I forget the ancient road to our house
and remember a passion like mandarin.

I forget the things I've said
and remember what I haven't said yet.

I forget my grandfather's stories and a sword on a wall
and remember my fear of sleep.

I forget a young woman's grape-filled lips
and remember the scent of lettuce on fingers.

I forget the houses that inscribed my narrative
and remember my identity card number.

I forget grand events and a destructive shake of earth
and remember my father's tobacco in the closet.

I forget the roads of departure to a deficient void
and remember the light of planets in the bedouin atlas.

I forget the whizzing of bullets in a village that is now deserted
and remember the cricket sound in the shrub.

I forget as I remember, or I remember that I forgot.

But I remember today,
Tuesday
and the weather is clear.

And I walk on a street that doesn't lead
 to a goal. Maybe my steps would guide me
 to an empty bench in the garden, or
 to an idea about the loss of truth between the aesthetic
 and the real. I sit alone as if I had a meeting with one
 of imagination's women. I imagine that I waited for long,
 got bored with waiting, then exploded when she arrived:
 Why were you late?! She lies and says:
 It was too crowded on the bridge, settle down...
 So I settle down as she fondles my hair, and I feel
 the garden is our room and the shadows our curtains:

If the canary doesn't sing
 to you, my friend ... know that
 you have overslept
 if the canary doesn't sing to you.

What are you saying? she asks.
 I say: The canary didn't sing to me, but do you
 recall who I am, stranger? Do I resemble the ancient
 pastoral poet who the stars crowned as king of the night ...
 the one who renounced his throne when the stars
 sent him as a shepherd for clouds?

She says: If today resembles yesterday,
 you seem to be you ...

There, on the opposite wooden bench,
 waiting crumbles a young woman
 who cries
 and drinks a glass of juice ...
 She brightens the crystal of my small heart
 and carries for me the emotions of this day.

I ask her: How did you get here?
 She says: By chance. I was walking
 on a street that doesn't lead to a goal.
 I say: I walk as if I have a rendezvous ...
 maybe my steps would guide me to an empty bench
 in the garden, or to an idea about the loss of truth
 between the imaginary and the real.
 She asks: So you, too, recall who I am, stranger?
 Do I resemble yesterday's woman, that young one
 with a braid and short songs about our love
 after a good long sleep?

I say: You seem to be you ...

Over there a boy enters
 through the garden gate
 carrying twenty-five irises
 to the woman who has waited for him.
 He carries, instead of me, the youth of this day:
 This heart, my heart, is small
 and the love, my love, is large.
 It travels in the wind, descends,
 loosens a pomegranate then falls
 in the wandering of two almond
 eyes, then ascends in the dawn
 of two dimples and forgets
 the way back to house and name.
 This heart, my heart, is small
 and the love is large ...

Was he the one I was
 or was I the one I wasn't?

She asks: Why do the clouds scratch the treetops?
 I say: For one leg to cling to another beneath the drizzle.

—Why does a frightened cat stare at me?
 —For you to put an end to the storm.

—Why does the stranger long for his yesterday?
 —For poetry to depend on itself.

—Why does the sky become ashen at twilight?
 —Because you didn't water the flowers in the pot.

—Why do you exaggerate your satire?
 —For song to eat a bit of bread every now and then.

—Why do we love then walk on empty roads?
 —To conquer the plenitude of death with less death and escape the abyss.

—Why did I dream I saw a sparrow in my hand?
 —Because you're in need of someone.

—Why do you remind me of a tomorrow I do not see you in?
 —You're one of eternity's features.

—You will walk alone to the tunnel of night when I'm gone.
 —I will walk alone to the tunnel of night when you're gone.

... and I walk,
 heavy as if I have an appointment with one of the defeats.
 I walk, and a poet in me readies himself for his eternal rest
 in a London night: My friend on the road to Syria,
 we haven't reached Syria yet, don't hurry, don't make the jasmine
 a bereaved mother, or test me with an elegy:
 how do I lift the poem's burden off you and me?

The poem of those who don't love describing fog
 is his poem.
 The coat of the clouds over the church
 is his coat.
 The secret of two hearts seeking Barada
 is his secret.
 The palm tree of the Sumerian woman, mother of song,
 is his tree.
 And the keys of Córdoba in the south of fog
 are his keys.
 He doesn't append his name to his poems,
 the little girl knows him
 if she feels the pinpricks
 and the salt in her blood.
 He, like me, is haunted by his heart,
 and I, like him, don't append my will to my name.
 And the wind knows my folks' new address
 on the slopes of an abyss
 in the south of the distant ...

Farewell, my friend, farewell, and bid Syria salaam.
 I am no longer young to carry myself
 upon the words, no longer young
 to finish this poem ...

And at night I walk with the *Dhad*, my private language, I walk
 with the night in the *Dhad*, an old man urging
 an aging horse to fly to the Eiffel Tower: O my language,
 help me to adapt and embrace the universe. Inside me
 there's a balcony no one passes under for a greeting.
 And outside me a world that doesn't return the greeting.
 My language, will I become what you'll become, or are you
 what becomes of me? Teach me the wedding parade
 that merges the alphabet with my body parts.
 Teach me to become a master not an echo.
 And wrap me up in your wool, help me
 to differ and reach consonance. Give birth to me and I

will give birth to you, sometimes I'm your son, and other times
your father and mother. If you are, I am. If I am, you are.
Call this new time by its foreign names, and host
the distant stranger and life's simple prose
for my poetry to mature. For who, if I utter what isn't poetry,
will understand me? Who will speak to me of a hidden
longing for a lost time if I utter what isn't poetry?
And who will know the stranger's land? ...

The night became tranquil and complete, a flower
woke up and breathed by the garden fence.

I said to myself: I am witness that I'm still alive
even if from afar. And that I dreamt about the one who had been
dreaming, like me, I dreamt he was I and not another ...
and that my day, Tuesday, was long and spacious,
and that my night was brief like a short act appended
to a play after the curtains had come down.
Still I won't harm anyone
if I add: It was a beautiful day,
like a true love story aboard an express train.

If the canary doesn't sing,
my friend,
blame only yourself.
If the canary doesn't sing
to you, my friend,
then sing to it ... sing to it.