

Mahmoud Darwish
Tuesday And The Weather Is Clear

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 love 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.

There is no land as narrow as a pot for roses like your land... and no land is 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 I walk to
 composed as 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 a mandarin.

I forget the things I have 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 bears, instead of me, the youth of this day:

This heart, my heart, is small
and the love, my love, is grand.
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 grand...

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 plentitude 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 within 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 Cordoba in the south of mist
are his keys.
He doesn't append his poems with his name,
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 family's 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.

At night, I walk with the *dhād*, my private language, I walk
with the night in the *dhād*, an old man urging
an aging horse to fly to Eiffel Tower: O my language,
help me to adapt and embrace the universe. Inside me
there's a balcony that 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, 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. 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, I woke up
 as a flower 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 me 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.

Translated by Fady Joudah