

Rana al-Tonsi

From A Rose for the Last Days

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On one foot
like a humiliated beggar I limp
past all the swinging doors
and the flags that are taken down from their masts ...
The sidewalk was never my friend
but it embraced me those times
when the crying was tough and bitter

In my country
soldiers go to a war
where they never fight
In every coffeehouse or square
under the feet of the sick, the sad and insane
you can glimpse the trace of a rose
thrown into the arms of nurses
in lonely rooms inhabited by wailing,
a rose drawn in blood.

I cannot believe the car has yet to stop
that I fell out of it like a scream
I know the lift attendant
never jumps off the fences
and that rocks keep wounding me
even though I've roamed for too long.

On one foot death will come and raise its head
Facing it, I will embrace this man strongly
and strangle all the poems in his hands
I will crush my bones under his hot breaths
My lungs are becoming two tubes
my feet like a battlefield
my heart a noose.



Am I really dead?
Only a while ago I was smelling that homeland.

* * *

In those empty streets
even dogs are afraid to cross
You will cross empty-handed
with a shadow that doesn't accompany you
and a backbreaking love
You will talk about your parents
the shock of sudden death
and the added light
which never lessens loneliness
When my eyes well up
and my pants are wet
as I stand before you
you will take a newspaper from your chest
and a mirror from your eyes
so that I may look into them
and know
that now I can go out.

* * *

Into one of those swamps
left by an old flood
the kind that drowns entire villages
I will jump like a bird with broken wings –
a bird's looking for a merciful killing
The bird which loved the behinds of every hen
can no longer fly
or spit
as is his wont every time he mounts
his eyes can neither close in sleep
nor let a tear fall

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But all the birds agree
he does shut them every now and then
although no one knows for sure
if he does it out of pleasure or out of pain
for a sad bird like him
can only dream of a long darkness

* * *

Every time I think of my own death
someone else dies
and the poem keeps writing itself

* * *

I embrace no one
my steps pass without me
the hand of the house burns me
The one who sleeps in my history
never wakes
his steps crush me at night
In the morning
I wake up scared, on his chest
He tells me
what I was not

He smokes his cigarette
like a returnee from war
He knows the precise number of its victims
and I, between stolen looks
and the sounds of his breathing,
know there was a lost letter from him.

Translated by Sinan Antoon

