

## **MY VOICE SOUGHT THE WIND**

*“Mi voz buscaba el viento para tocar su oído” – Pablo Neruda*

*“My voice sought the wind to touch your hearing” – Pablo Neruda*

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# The Gift of Olive Oil

A token

Something from the soil of things shared

    a heritage

    a longing

    a wound

The sweet and bitter tastes of centuries gone

The hard caress of weatherworn hands of pickers

The tales of backbreaking toil, scribbled on beautiful fellaheen faces

The ballads of old, sung to trees and sleepless Palestinian children

The untamed agonies of loss and expired love

    the soot of memory,

    the breath of hope,

    the fury,

    the tears of babies

    and patriarchs,

    mothers and whores

    gods and men

This nectar of tragedy is ours to consume

Ours to bury and bring back to life

Take it from their tireless hands

Their boundless capacity to endure

And without bread or *za'atar*,<sup>1</sup> dip your finger in this oil

Press it between your tongue and palate

Do it again

Until you hear the primal calls of an earth packed beneath boot steps and tank treads

And it will haunt you with an unexpected song

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<sup>1</sup> Crushed thyme and sesame, Palestinian snack food typically eaten with olive oil

## Ramadan in el Ghorba

All the restaurants are open  
Taunting with various scents  
Most don't even know it's Ramadan  
Or that I'm fasting

There is no solidarity in *el Gorba*<sup>2</sup>  
Not from shopkeepers or neighbors

A single *fanoos*<sup>3</sup> is nowhere to be found  
You don't walk down the street here and  
Nod to another in mutual acknowledgment  
Of shared hunger and thirst

There will be no superhuman meal tonight  
No gathering of first second and third generation cousins

There is no collective exhaustion here  
Followed by collective merriment

There will be no sitting on the floor around the feast  
The *adan*<sup>4</sup> will not breeze through our hearts with its permission

Here, the time is different, too  
And so, I will not do the exact same thing  
At the exact same time  
As millions will do every evening this month

Dusk will come unannounced, like any other sundown  
Someone recommended coffee instead of Zoloft to break the fast.  
I'll do my best to stick with *shorabat freika*<sup>5</sup>

And a pre-recorded *adan*

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<sup>2</sup> A word (no English equivalent) describing the state of being a stranger, and the sense of not belonging when living foreign lands or in exile

<sup>3</sup> Arabesque lantern

<sup>4</sup> Muslim call to prayer

<sup>5</sup> Barley soup typically eaten during Ramadan to break the fast

## Mahmoud Darwish<sup>6</sup>

We saw you tear off your limbs  
To pass through the narrow passage

Now you know  
Where birds fly after the last sky

What color is the last beat of a poet's heart?

What word is it?

Is it the humble majesty of the Holy Sepulcher?  
Or the lullaby of the *adan* over Palestine?

What was that last contraction?  
That sent ripples of love and grief across our earth

The last call from the Voice of Palestine.

You left us too soon, ya Mahmoud.

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<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the most important contemporary Arab poet, Mahmoud Darwish was born a Palestinian refugee and died in 2011, still a refugee.

# Sister Palestinian

Sister Palestinian

Your fate was written

The day you played hopscotch

When they pulled the land from under your feet

So you carried your country on your back

In the bags handed to you on the long march to oblivion

When your father, king of his castle was forced to sleep on dirt

You served him coffee and scrubbed his feet to save his pride

When your mother went mad and died with anguish

Your tears watered a refugee's garden

Someone put two gold bracelets on your wrist

The ones with gemmed snake eyes we all wear

And you stared at them on your wedding night

As you gripped the bedposts with white knuckles

The first time your husband hit you

It nearly knocked the country off you back

But your first baby was a promise too precious

So, you sewed Palestine to your skin

When he came back from Israel's prison

You tenderly dressed his wounds

Kissed them

And you prayed for him

You loved him

And he left five months

After your second daughter was born

European women, he said

Knew how to please a man

He said, you had never been an exciting fuck

He didn't mind that European women couldn't  
Pronounce his name

He never knew about his third daughter  
Whom you named *Fairuz*<sup>7</sup>  
For the voice that was your only solace

When another of history's storms razed your house  
The winds carried you to foreign lands

And you were at home in the devastating  
Freedom of answering to no one

When, then, you became an exciting fuck  
You would find yourself searching, over and over,  
For some meaning in the heartbreak  
Of an empty orgasm

The girls you raised were not Palestinian  
The house you built was not yours

The country tethered to you skin sags  
As if a body of sorrow

You deserve better, Sister  
Come back in another life

To a country that holds you  
A man who honors the language of your heart

And daughters who will sing  
For you a Palestinian lullaby  
Before you finally sleep

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<sup>7</sup> A famous Lebanese singer

## **Neruda in a Heart**

Let your voice seek the wind, my love  
I'll climb the air with my bare heart  
And tug at God's cloak  
Until I find the sound so loved  
Hold it to touch my ear  
And fill my empty womb

I'll stay a while  
At the edge of a story that almost was  
A relentless longing that is  
And a country that forever shall be

Meet me there  
In the rapture of freedom  
The abandon of this determined love  
And the expanse of what we found

Wrap me in your embrace and hold me there  
To quiet this mad heart of mine  
If but for a moment

I'll take it home, petulant and unruly thing  
And sing for it a lullaby of your voice in the wind