

Aleppo Diary

Fouad M. Fouad

Translated from Arabic by the author and Norbert Hirschhorn

1.

Writing hurts.

The blood dripping down the TV screen
poisons the air,
stains the couch with what looks like
dried coffee. We touch, trembling,
afraid of infection.

Our backs bent as if descending to hell,
red and brown rust spots
reflect on our faces.

We rub our heads, turn away,
and lick the salt from tears.

They who crawl from street to screen
leave green traces on the tarmac,
which burst into bushes of basil.
They throw us a flower and die quickly
to spare us from shame.

Take off your shoes, walk on broken glass,
for now you are in a sacred valley.

2.

I sit on my balcony. Aleppo, spread before me, black and deserted. A clatter of dishes in the dark means life does go on. No other sound save sporadic gunfire somewhere distant until a peculiar whistle before the shell explodes. Someone leaves this earth with a dry throat. Aleppo before me

remains black, and still. Those huge shadows might be trees, or childhood goblins or black vapours exhaled by women waiting for their children, they already numbers in a news bulletin.

3.

Perhaps a time to water plants growing
by a fallen wall, a shattered alley
in the black-and-white city named Aleppo.

In the gap between two houses, a sparrow
trembles in a child's hand, and a sniper
combs his pomaded hair behind a stack

of books shielding against death from the sky.
Inside the church an angel, wings outstretched,
pierced by tears and bullets, and a boy

smutched with dust, laughing. The sniper sucks
seeds from a pomegranate, lets his rifle
rest against a wall. In Aleppo.

In Aleppo, Death grows in alleys like a
rotted plant, pours from the sky:
nuts, bolts, TNT and chlorine.

Death stares into the mirror
for one moment, turns, sights,
pulls the trigger.

People on bread lines know all this.
Also children reciting in school.
And a hunchbacked old man.

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