

THE ANDALUSIA PRIZE ANTHOLOGY
2001 – 2006

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Edited by Zeshan Syed and Fathima Cader

Silsilah Forward
Toronto | Chicago

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Cover and book design by Rhian Sinnadurai.
Andalusia Prize for Literature website: <http://www.andalusiaprize.com>.

SECOND EDITION

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Syed, Zeshan.

The Andalusia Prize Anthology 2001-2006 / Zeshan Syed.—2nd ed.

p. cm.

A compilation of the best in poetry and fiction produced by writers over the span of years 2001-2006 as determined by judges and editors of The Andalusia Prize.

I. Anthologies. II. Poetry. III. Short stories.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This publication comprises work submitted by writers in England, the United States, and elsewhere. The differences in US spelling and that of England and Canada have been maintained in this volume. As the subject matter varies from one writer's voice to the next, care was put into making the whole collection enjoyable to read. Not all prize winners have been included in this anthology, and some more serious pieces have been set alongside lighter ones, what Ezra Pound may have described in his 'ABC of Reading' as "mental beds". With that in mind, this collection tries to blend various tones, subjects, and styles to provide a mixture of imaginations having common inspiration.

Acknowledgments

Those involved with the production of this anthology would like to thank those who have helped manifest the momentum of inspiration that has gathered since 2001, the year the Prize began. For their help judging work, we wish to thank Yahiya Emerick, Reshma Baig, Dasham Brookins, Yasir Khan, Mohamed Rezvan, and Isla Rosser-Owen. Thank you, Daniel Abdal-hayy Moore for your counsel and for the statement we placed as our introduction to this anthology. Thank you, Saba Syed, Attia Zaidi, and Raheel Ahmed for your help. A special thanks to Asifa Sheikh and Zainab Basheer for their enthusiasm and practical help with organization. Thanks also to Thomas Abraham, our webmaster and friend. Finally, I wish to thank my wife Soobia for her support.

This anthology is dedicated to T.B. Irving and Abdal-Hayy Moore.

-Zeshan Syed, Toronto, 2007

Sailing to Andalus

Abul Arifin Syed

Toronto, 2000

The name of 'Atlantis'
Sounds as 'Andalus' does—
Geography forgot the forests and fortresses
Of Muslim Spain.
And yet, we sail to Andalus again;
We sail again
and we sail again...

The name of the 'Inquisitions'
recalls a hissing blaze—
crackling and crackling from flames reaching our chins,
Hot fires burying books
In piles of ash.
The name of Andalus,
The *pride* of our past.

But, sailing to Andalus, I convey:
'We need new names,
We need *new* Spains.
So let's sail to Andalus, but now anew,
For the past is done, and the future's to do.'

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Foreground

Bismillah i'r Rahmaan i'r Raheem

Modern scholars tell us Muslim Spain is a civilisation the world has yet to repeat. They point to the grandeur of al-Andalus's spiritual, scientific, and literary legacy. And yet, the vast majority of its poetry has been lost in the fires of the Spanish Inquisition. What survives, though, fires the imagination of folk from around the world. In Toronto, a Canadian metropolis that happens to share geographical latitudes with Spain, a writers' guild felt inspired by Andalusia. In 2001, it launched The Andalusia Prize as an annual prize for poetry and fiction awarded to honour the literary legacy of Muslim Spain.

-Zeshan Syed, Toronto, 2002

Introduction

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

December 16, 2004

Statement on the Andalusia Prize for Literature 2004

Bismillah i'r Rahmaan i'r Raheem

For my part as a judge in the Andalusia Prize for Literature 2004, I was honored to read the works of those who submitted poems or short stories. As one of the stated intentions of the prize is to create a mystique for Muslim literature in English, it was gratifying to find diverse voices putting into words often difficult themes and crucial junctures in their lives, or the lives of others, to wrestle them into poetry or prose, to shape them into literature.

Judging is always a difficult corner to be put in, and judging this year's entries with two other judges made more poignant to me the contests I've entered and lost. The sifting isn't arbitrary, but it is influenced by the opinions of the judges, their tastes and temperaments. Trying to be objective is almost impossible, though the attempt to maintain the integrity of certain criteria is the intended goal. The winners of any contest of this kind might not feel too proud nor the losers too humiliated. In the case of the winners this year they stood out for ingenuity, technical mastery, or a true sense of what a poem or story is, going straight to the heart and mind and not just an assemblage of words in some form or other in a near approximation of something meaningful. And those that succeeded were taken from the available pool, not necessarily as the highest models of the stated ideal.

Which brings me to suggest to all of us to maintain a very open mind regarding our influences and to accept a very wide sense of what is being or has been written in world literature, whether or not the writers are Muslim, and from those who write in a foreign language, great ones of the past as well as those who are writing

poetry or prose today, 21st century, now. We must become global. We should know the literatures at least passingly of French and Spanish, German, Russian, a sense of world vision that is not merely influenced by pop lyrics to songs, rap-performance pieces, rhyming just for the sake of rhyming (excellent in person, not often as excellent on the page), or the untutored notion that anyone can write, without any study of the craft and soul of writing.

Muslims should get rid of the idea of never reading non-Muslim authors, and that they are writing only for other Muslims, the “chosen few”...we are people in the world, if not of it, and everyone, we should remember, is Muslim in essence. We should also avoid the idea that if we read other writers we will be influenced negatively and lose our own voice...not something for a young writer particularly to be worried about. When young, we should sound like everybody. Distinctive voice comes later.

And Muslim writers, unless writing what is called in the West “theology,” needn’t be constrained by excessive piety. We don’t want to produce simply goody-goody literature, with everyone in a story or novel stopping to do the prayer with military precision and always on time, but rather a deeply and intensely alive literature, where the conclusion of a story isn’t forgone, or the poetry isn’t merely a series of rhetorical rephrasings of the basic tenets of Islam. As a great Muslim friend, Imam Ibrahīm Jobe, may Allah be pleased with him, from Senegal once told a group of us writers sitting around casually after a conference, one doesn’t go to poetry for Truth, but for Feeling. For Truth you go to the Qur’an, the Hadith, the shuyukh and ulama, to texts on fiqh, or Sufism, etc. But for feeling and things of the heart we go to our poets and storytellers—to enlighten, but also to entertain, to bring a sense of life, and to bring our senses to life. To sweeten or shock into life (sometimes) our hearts and the hearts of others...and “bring to light” where we can.

I encourage the writers who submitted pieces to stretch their imaginations, try other ways to express the nearly inexpressible, combining image, sound, and meaning together in a heady brew. Tears might come to the reader, but we might avoid too many tears

in our pieces, unless we're writing soap operas or romance novels. And don't be afraid of the imagination...it's an entrance into the Garden, or at least a glimpse through one of the high oval windows.

But the imagination must be ridden with humility as well as passion, and with concomitant inspiration from spiritual dimensions bidden and submitted to. For Islamic inspiration, the Sufi poets (ibn al-Farid, Rumi, Hafez, Attar) are oceans of breath and other-dimensional heartbeats, vast in their conceptions, but always specific in their renditions. But stern realistic writing can also be inspiring, written well. Gritty noir writing is valid, intense fragmented journal-jottings, immediate perceptions and fleeting thoughts in gem-like sentences...aphorisms, satire, mystical visions! There's nothing (and no Wahhabi either) to stop us. A feel for real life, for the grit and grace we all know.

And we needn't write just what we know, that pernicious dictum of many a creative writing class. I believe we write what we don't know, and find out in the process of writing (the Sufi belief that the cosmos is within us, and all we need to do is look deeply into ourselves to see it...). We have to make of ourselves seers, and write as if our lives depended on it. Lose the nafs, the ego, or expand it beyond its narrow margins, and rely in a real way on Allah. But write personally, attentive to particulars and avoid sweeping and highfalutin abstractions that sound good and get the requisite "al-hamdulillahs" or takbirs from an audience, perhaps, or loved ones, but trip no switches and click on no lights.

Formalism of rhyme and meter in poetry particularly is also excellent and tried and true over centuries, but a difficult thing to hold onto in English with its fewer rhyme endings than in other languages. A great deal of bad or "uptight" poetry is written in rhyme forms that hopes no one notices because it is in good (though in less adept hands, often clippy) rhyme and meter. A lot of bad "free verse" or "open form" poetry is also being written, of course, but we should know the beating heart of a poem, what a poem is, and be able to locate its heartbeat in the process of writing, whether we hold to form or forge in the moment of writing a new form indigenous to the poem

itself. Both formalist and non-formalist poets should know the terrain trod before and sense the depth of the tracks of precursors to give body to their inspirations. I have a running argument with some venerable modern Islamic scholars about this, whose hopes for a rooted tradition and a literature that parallels Arabic models, perhaps, include a kind of retro glance at past literature in English that often seems reductive. A modern canon of acceptable literature for Muslims to emulate must not be confined to a few formalists. Artists must be courageous and strong in their life-experience and aesthetic convictions and lift new instruments to their lips if they have them in reality and can play them with purpose, and for us, of course, that includes divine light, if that is where our hearts lie, and if that is where our hearts tell the truth.

With these strange utterances, I happily greet the writers who entered the contest, as well as those who slipped away from it. I pray the "mystique" grows, and that we see the heart's satisfaction that comes from excellent literature taken seriously (though humor is allowed, and not much humor appeared this year, alas) and done with true depth and finesse. I extend my hand as an elder, with no claims for expertise, but perhaps just a little mileage. And with a prayer for blessings on all the hearts that wish to bridge gaps in our social fabric and in our mutual human understandings, with the girders of "native" (in English) vibrant literature. For this, I congratulate equally the winners and losers, and look forward to further developments for all of us.

Adhaan

George Yusuf Pecan

Part One: The Boat

“ALLAHU AKBAR! ALLAHU AKBAR!” he shouted. “ALLAHU AKBAR!” another time, and his voice echoed from inside his room all around the bay. “ALLAHU AKBAR!” he shouted again. And again, a distant voice repeated his words.

He wanted to keep shouting, but noticing for the first time the ceiling his body faced, the quiet surroundings momentarily startled him. He was lying on his back, on a bed—in a house he knew he owned. The window frames, square mouths on opposing sides of the thatched hut on the beach, let in gusts of warm air. The space was shadowy. Light came in between the door frame and the moving edges of the cloth that hung from the top of the doorway to the floor. Some light reached the opposite wall, some light twinkled along the ceiling’s grid surface, and some light moved over his feet.

He sweated; he dreamt. He heard waves sliding onto the beach. The Atlantic Ocean persisted in its effort to submerge this tiny disc of an island. But the little island had so far enjoyed a secret success against the giant ocean. He heard the minute sounds of distant birds. He turned his head away from the ceiling and felt, in his dizziness, as if the exertion pushed him off a ledge. His gaze fixed itself outside through the open window on his right: He saw a square section of indigo sky surrounded by the black of his room. The sky grew lighter every minute.

He raised himself out of bed and went outside.

He felt dizzy and uneasy. Wearing only shorts, Bilal emerged from his small residence on the beach of his tiny island. It was about 300 kilometres south-west of continental Portugal. Lofty clouds—checked by a large black dome of earth rising from his left, the cliff at the end of the bay—filled the sky, and the elegant westerly wind pushed them over the water. The Ocean waves at the base of the

cliff splashed with usual vigour. Bilal saw the activity of water and foam from afar, but heard nothing of its sound for the cliff was 500 metres away. His feet disturbed the pristine morning sand. He left a trail of footprints by his meandering walk out of the hut.

He shivered and squinted his eyes. Blinking repeatedly, walking with his arms folded on his chest, he reached the water and fell to his knees on the warm, wet sand.

*

We found him sitting half-submerged; the waves came up as high as his chest. The warm water washed him amid the sporadic sounds of shore birds. He sat with his arms wrapped around his knees. His face conveyed unease. We saw his lips quivering, and we perceived a repeating murmur coming out of his shivering chest.

He eventually made Fajr prayers with us, and by noon he moved and spoke with energy. The sun lit the world through fleets of moving clouds; everyone had been awake for hours. By this time, we had all gathered in the building on the mountain for our work assignments. My group left for the cliffs of the bay as he pushed buttons on his phone. He smiled and said to me: "I'll see you people soon—" and as the phone connected—"Ma, hey, us-Salaamu 'alaykum...it's me...."

He turned around and walked to the conference room of the concrete building. I couldn't hear the conversation, of course—that would be impolite—but, lingering, I watched him step onto the verandah attached to that room. He held the wireless phone to his ear as if he was listening to a phrase of immense wisdom secretly residing within a sea shell. I thought that our work on the island was very strange, and in an instant I returned to it.

Walking briskly down the steps of the concrete building and over the trails of footprints and wheels, I joined my group. We proceeded leisurely to the cliffs and the boat at its base.

By the time we passed the thatched huts along the middle of the curving shore we were under a full sun. Many of the clouds had

gone. The sunlight bathed us, and, glistening from our own sweat, we reached the elevated cliff grounds satisfied by a good walk.

We laboured the rest of the day, and returned at Zuhr and 'Asr time to the yellow and brown huts along the beach where stood a masjid.

Before entering the masjid we went to wash for prayer in the wudu area, which lay a few yards from the back of the masjid. The wudu area consisted of about forty-five marble cubes placed in intervals around a low curving wall. This wall crescent had a funny habit of catching and redirecting, from one end to the other, voices and sounds of the splashing water. Water came out of pipes in front of the marble cubes we would sit on. We would sit and wash for prayer as the falling water ran around a ditch between our feet and the low wall, which created a curving moat of water around the back of the masjid. Though the pipes had an off-valve, we never closed the pipes. The water drained into the water filtering system underneath the beach. We could hear the murmur of running water from inside the masjid, which was built of reeds.

Bilal had insisted on this type of old-fashioned material for the one masjid, two storehouses, and 45 huts on the island. With displeasure, he had accepted our request to construct the central building with concrete and bricks. That building was on the raised central land at the heart of the island—what he called the island's mountain. He enjoyed staying there, it turned out, and he would grinningly refer to the structure as 'the Command Center'.

He employed four groups on his island. The first group, our group, had nine members including me. The second group had nine also, and they worked along the shore line and dusty cliff base often using a boat. Fifteen more, mostly S.C.U.B.A. divers, shared two boats to search waters all around the island. The fourth and final group had only four persons who worked on computers in the Command Center. He would emerge from that building with the team of four and walk with them to the masjid on the beach. His voice, when he called Adhaan, would catch our attention suddenly.

He called the Adhaan standing on top of the strong and flat roof of the masjid. A ladder always leaned against the outside wall of the building. His manner of moving during prayer time—Maghrib, ‘Isha, Fajr, Zuhr, or ‘Asr—slowed; and we would see him slowly descending the ladder with that aspect natural to an old and delicate man as the nine of us walked down from the cliff toward the beach.

After ‘Asr that day, we returned to the cliffs as usual. The men who stayed on the island for only one or two weeks were always the first ones back to the cliffs. Their Qasr prayers were shorter than the permanent workers like me who were not travelling.

He left the masjid later than everyone and appeared before Maghrib time at the cliff grounds. He sat away from our work area, in the grass, wearing a blue shalwaar-chemise suit. When I first saw the suit I was surprised by the quality of it. We had both been on the island since the beginning and I never saw him wear it before that day. I had no idea he even had such a suit. You have to understand about these suits: they are loose, casual, 100 percent cotton clothes that comprise baggy pants and a full-sleeved shirt that extends separately down the front and back to the knees; these two lower parts of the chemise often flutter in the breeze. Surrounded by Portuguese and Moroccan diggers, this Pakistani man wore his traditional Pakistani clothing and watched the Atlantic Ocean.

But he jumped up when came a sound like that of thunder. It was a gigantic ripping sound, as if an enormous mouth had bitten into a giant apple. The sound seemed to come from everywhere. There was not a cloud in the sky now, no chance of a storm. Bilal bounded forward, then crawled to the cliff’s edge on all fours. He must have been looking at the other team of nine and their boat at the base of the cliff. The ripping kept going, as of a stampede of one million horses; getting louder and louder; all around us, on top of us. The ground moved, a giant was rousing from sleep.

“There’s a hole in the cliff-everybody off! Now!” he yelled back at us. “Leave the equipment. To the beach! To the beach!”

A big dust cloud rose up from the side of the cliff, and we could no longer see the Atlantic. It rose slowly, looking at us. The giant cloud was a bald, brown face, rolling back to look up, the sun its yawning mouth. At first, no one but Bilal saw the damage, for we at once rushed to the lower grounds of the beach. The debris of dust and dirt buried the other group at the base of the cliff. The debris fell for ten minutes creating a dome that was half sinking in the water.

Part Two: The Traveller

Two weeks later, after we made the findings, we would look back to the incident that night as the beginning of a prolonged epiphany; for from that point onwards, the project went from one success to the next. It was not that the treasures of the island were suddenly laid bare—as you might suspect—but, rather, it was that a realisation about the island came to us.

The landslide prompted us to think. Bits of information we knew about the island began to correlate and at speed we made a single theory: a key to unlock the secret of the island. And with the immense expertise in digging, diving, geology, and archaeology that Bilal had brought together in the teams, our key was made immediately useful. We rapidly made a plan of action.

Thus, the miracle proceeded as follows: after a landslide, which buried a team of nine men, the rest of us spent one night digging them out; Alhumdoulillah, they were all alive because they were sheltered in their boat when the cliff started collapsing from above; within an hour of their rescue, we theorised what the island was; in the evening, two helicopters filled with explosives had flown over from the Azores and landed on top of the Command Center; we blew the cliff into the ocean using multiple detonations of those explosives; the following day, we began to catalogue on computers in the Command Center the items we brought from the former cliff grounds, now a flat floor of black rock.

There is no way with our previous mode of thinking that we could have found the artifacts buried under the cliff. No careful exploration

would have allowed us to find the shipwreck we were looking for. It is likely that we would never have found anything; but maybe for the extreme intelligence which we became accustomed to seeing in Bilal, we might have somehow found the wreckage in three or four more years of careful exploration. I remember thinking as our detonations ripped the cliff apart that it was more than one thousand years of volcanic ash we were clearing, it was one thousand years of history. An immense sense of tentative ease came over us, and we smiled frequently at each other that day for the imminent success of our work for which Bilal employed us.

It took two weeks for us to clear all the items from that tarry, black ground upon which a cliff had once stood. The combined space of our two storehouses could only store some of what we found, and nearly a third we stored in the boats and Command Center. The items were in excellent condition and intact. Nothing was broken. Bilal had all given us a vague description of his hopes, except me. He told me one night, what it was he wanted to find—what he knew he would find. “A boat of perfect proportions, white, and in perfect—good condition,” he said cutting the air slowly with his hand. We were sitting around a fire one evening, on logs we dragged from the forestry to the beach in order to enjoy the dying colours of the sky.

Where on the horizon the sun had lingered one hour before, colours streaked across.

“Around that—around the boat—are the fragments of other ships. We won’t know the total number of other boats. It may have been many, or just one large boat. It will be as if rooms were detached from their vessels and submerged in the dirt. We will find many, many things,” he said looking at me, “like gold coins, silver coins. . . .”

“Really?” I said amused, leaning back on the log with my right leg bent up and my left leg stretched forward, inter-locking my hands over my raised knee.

“There will be seven thousand. . . five hundred gold coins or silver coins.”

“You’re not sure!?” I protested sarcastically. This point of vagueness in his predictions amused me. He smiled, looking intensely at the sandy ground.

“No, it’s either one or the other...insha Allah, insha Allah,” he said looking at my face. And without looking away, he seemed to suddenly not see me; as if perceiving a villain slipping athletically out of the ocean directly behind me and then standing motionless at a distance, gazing intently at the two of us and the light coming out of the fire. “Forget the rest, the most impressive thing will be a round metal...thing. A sphere. It will be a fantastic find. We will read Arabic script impressed all over it. It will be intensely coded with calligraphy-”

“The whole thing?”

“Sura Yaseen will be on it. It will be covered totally. Really complicated–complex. Some sort of effort will be needed to open it–a key, or maybe a metal bar to pry it open. Something really scholarly. Within it there is something from Cordoba–Muslim Spain–” he stood up instantly, took a big breath, and whispered to all the waves of the ocean–“al-Andalus. . . .”

I recall that evening vividly, though extreme darkness surrounded our space. But in the end there was a bout of comedy. For some reason, I can’t remember, we were throwing bits of metal and coins into the fire and the fire went out. The smoke in the aftermath was immense. We both stood up. Our feet were submerged in what seemed to be a swamp of smoke. Light from our slow moving flashlights moved over the columns of twisting grey phantoms as we looked around for matches. When I could not see Bilal, for the stream of rising smoke came between us like an undulating tree, I called out, “insha Allah, we will talk in the morning, eh?”

“Insha Allah,” he said, interrupted by the ringing of his phone, which he took everywhere except the Masjid. “Hello?”

The caller asked something about a smoke signal. Bilal laughed out loud; and the echo around the bay–this was long before we blew up the cliff–was tremendous. One of the programmers working on

the mapping data in the Command Center had seen the rising smoke and called Bilal, joking about smoke signals.

Our flashlights seemed to project on the ground ahead of us circular images of grass and sand as we got away from the smoke. Bilal suggested that the two of us should visit the programmer in the Command Center who was working late. I agreed.

Walking uphill to the Center, Bilal erupted in giggles and shook his head when looking at me—wondering how I missed the humour. I don't remember the joke, but he tried to get me to laugh then, telling me the joke four different ways—emphasizing different words each time. But I remember thinking the joke was not very funny. He was still smiling when we reached the Command Center. We arrived in the Conference room and noticed in the brightness of artificial lighting that our clothes still emitted tiny swirls of greyish vapour.

Our man at the Command Center had left a note for us on the wall before he left for his home on the beach. Bilal read it and put it back on the wall almost distractedly, for the exuberant joy along the way had exhausted him.

*

In two months the island changed considerably. The people, now finished their work, had gone; and the cliff, an old part of the island, was no longer there.

On the last day, we learned about a lot of things. Because we had worked so diligently, and we felt we were a small community rather than a collection of labourers. Bilal seemed very relaxed when he talked with us. He talked so frankly, we were listening to revelations. Our equipment lay outside under a pensive sky.

"I had a dream. In the dream I died—Allahu Akbar—inna lillaahe wa inna eelaahe raajeeoon...I called my mother later on in the afternoon—you remember, right?"

Most remembered, for it was only two weeks ago that we found him sitting about two meters in the water early one morning.

"I remember screaming in the dream—and then, in real life," he said. The wind whistled at that moment in the eeriest way I have ever heard in my life. "It was strange; I wasn't sure when I stopped dreaming. But...for sure, by the time you people found me for Fajr, I was awake." The only real sound was his voice, and, having gathered around him after 'Asr, we listened with interest.

"I can only say that the dream was scary, and my defense to the bad part of the dream was to make Adhaan...as loud as I could. It was the only thing I could think of!" he said, looking at the palm of his right hand—as if pleading with it.

"Is your mother feeling okay?" asked a young Moroccan worker.

"Na'am, Alhumdoulillah, she's fine. She was sleeping when I called her...time difference. She should be okay—my grandfather is having, or had, an operation...I don't know."

"May Allah make it easy for him," I said.

He whispered, "insha Allah."

A moment of tranquility passed us. "This is amazing," he said, "Alhumdoulillah! Sub'haan Allah!" He smiled and we were changed: imagine an eclipse in the middle of the day, and when the sun is clear, and the light comes back, sunlight develops across the red tops of fifty shimmering roses. He rapidly fell into ecstasy sitting there, lowering his gaze and contemplating, and smiling. The fragrance of roses came to us; we felt the sweet enveloping silence.

But we jumped up when came a sound like that of thunder. It was awesome, as if lungs the size of continents began blasting a sound through our hearts. The walls quivered. We were not cold, but we shivered ceaselessly. The sound seemed to come from everywhere. There was not a cloud in the sky now, no chance of a storm. We went outside in the torrential booming of this...voice.

It was the loudest Adhaan I have ever heard. I cannot think of one being louder. My ears did not hurt; nor did any of us cover his ears. It was total and soft. It must have been rippling through the universe—who could not have heard it?

We not only heard it but saw where it came from. Stepping outside, we saw a man on the roof of the Masjid covering his ears with his hands; and we noticed that when he moved his lips that the sound we were in adjusted exactly. It was unnatural for the imagination to connect the sensational and encompassing voice with this short man on the roof. But there he was and here was his voice all around us.

Allah is Greater!
Allah is Greater!
Allah is Greater!
Allah is Greater!
I bear witness none is worthy of worship except Allah!
I bear witness none is worthy of worship except Allah!
I bear witness Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah!
I bear witness Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah!
Come to Prayer!
Come to Prayer!
Come to Success!
Come to Success!
Allah is Greater!
Allah is Greater!
None is worthy of worship except Allah!

This Adhaan went on for a time longer than what we were accustomed to. Clouds as dark as lines of ink stretched across the giant dome of the sky. The sound of his voice went out of the universe slowly; a ringing clung to the substance of the earth; just as residual water clings to branches and grass after a shower of Spring rain. The very colour of quietness had changed, become dense with melody.

When he finished the Adhaan, he said "us-Salaamu 'alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh, ya Muslimeen!" in a soft, normal voice. He climbed down the ladder and went into the Masjid thoughtfully. All 51 of us stood in a cluster in front of the Masjid, still stunned, marveling. He wore a clay-red robe made of rough cloth. The robe had many folds. The man walked with downcast eyes. We watched him sit down in the Masjid, in the front row.

Gathered outside, we looked at each other; smiling; wondering; anxious; vexed.

“Well, it is Maghrib time,” said Bilal and he walked into the Masjid and sat in the front row, too. We went in and made Maghrib. The stranger gave the Iqamah with a normal voice. Bilal led the prayer.

Part Three: The White Boat

After Maghrib, we listened to the stranger. He had no accent at all. His English was straight out of America or Canada.

“I was an apprentice to a very clever man. His name was Abdullah ibn Yusuf al Andalusi—known better as Abu'l Ibar, the author of widely read books. He published his books under the name Abu'l Ibar for reasons he never told me outright. The topics he wrote about were extensive. In the Cordoban Academy, the main university of al-Andalus's capital city, first year Arabic students read his primer on Arabic grammar. I think he wrote that one in 265 A.H. Professors included his book about rocks and crystals, *Kitab al-Hajara al-Jameela*, in the reading list for a natural science course. In mathematics, Abu'l Ibar did not write any book of renown, except a pamphlet on abstract algebra. He made this pamphlet, called *Ikhtisar Majhulat al-Jabr*, for the Algebra Club of the Academy because they wanted to give something to children—so that they might acquire an interest for complex mathematics early in their schooling.

“His home comprised a rectangular lawn enclosed by a red brick building, two storeys tall. His workshop was one long and spacious room on the second floor. My teacher would often gaze down at the flowers in his lawn from the open window of his workshop. The use of most of this inner lawn would be subject to the weather. At times, my teacher would allow me to help him with some gardening in the lawn; he would let me listen to him talk...mostly to himself.

“His home was of a common type. Most inhabited that type of house because they had large families. But my teacher filled his home with books.

“The main entrance of the structure opened towards a path that ran parallel to the front, ending abruptly at one end with the wall marking the edge of his land, and ending at the other at a gate that opened onto a highly trafficked road. The road’s name was al-mahajja al-‘uzma. Our building stood in the central part of the city, north of the river. Spires and towers loomed over our roof. Cordobans knew our building as a fortress of quality in various types of business; we specialised in binding books.

“I give you this setting so you may feel the movement of the city; perhaps take in a vision of the lamps hanging from poles along the edges of streets, of avenues lined with orange and fig trees shooting up from a under a cement floor; massive branches hanging over the streets and letting light filter elegantly through leaves that lay a system of undulating shadows on the ground; a ground walked over by womens’ feet—women enveloped in cloth, formless and flowing, markets emitting colours and scent dazzling. The Masjids wonderful. You could not look to the beauty of the city and forget to say *Allhumdouillah*, to say All praise belongs to Allah!”

“Glory to Creator of the sky without pillars; glory to the Creator of all things,” I whispered firmly.

“Yes!” he said agreeing, looking at me with wide eyes. And returning his gaze to the ground, he continued: “such a feeling my teacher related. He was at that point very old. He had stopped constructing machines, or conducting experiments. His genius was retiring from all fields of science because of his age; but still, one day, he was standing outside the front gate of the house when I was walking home. With a contemplative look, he looked at a portion of the sky behind me and proclaimed, ‘Glory be to Allah, the one who created a sky without pillars! Glory be to the Creator of all things!’—except that he spoke in Arabic. Everyone spoke Arabic; it was the language of the scholars; the language of the city, the country—of the world.”

"It still is," said someone.

The stranger said, "Of course, but the people need to learn it, to understand the grammar—a simple book would help: the *Ajrumiyyah*, for example..." He continued: "I looked to the spot in the sky where my teacher pointed with his finger. A white ball of light moved diagonally across our sky and out of our sight, disappearing behind the mountains. It headed west. It was a comet. We turned around, I opened the gate for him, then followed him down the lane, then turned left into the front entrance of the house—the doors were left open (it was very warm then)—and my teacher said 'look,' and brought me sketches he made during my absence in the afternoon of that day."

The stranger looked at us and smiled slowly, as if he was unsure whether all of his facial muscles would work. "We developed a...balloon. Developed it into the design of a boat made of wood. The first boat we made flew over and above the call of duty," said the stranger with a chuckle—by now the short man was rocking a little, as if already amused by the wit and humour of a joke he was about to tell.

"This is the boat we found?" asked Bilal (we all sat around the stranger in a large semi-circle within the masjid).

"Oh, not the boat you found—this white boat, that ended up in the black earth—"

"Izzat 'black earth' on ziss island?" asked one of the Moroccan diggers.

The stranger frowned pointed to the wall with his finger saying emphatically yet in a soft voice, "Yes. I am talking about what you found. Will you listen?"

Bilal slipped in this question to get the stranger back to his talk: "That boat was never yours?"

"Never ours; we built three boats. The first two we built ourselves for ourselves, but the third boat was for the Andalusian fleet. Our first boat flew higher than we expected. We were seen by

many people; the Amir—or someone in the government—had seen the ship. But the ship you found on this island is a ship made for the Andalusian fleet. It's name is al-Falnesia, and it's cargo was unique...

"I don't want to speculate with regard to how old Abu'l Ibar was, he never told me. He was a quiet man, but kind. He would be sensitive to things that other people would ignore; it was hard for him to get along with many persons at once for he always wanted to give full attention to one task at a time. But he had a good heart...may Allah have Mercy on him: he was a good teacher...he never scolded me too severely. But again, he was an old man—widowed for a long, long time—and a woman would have to be very uncommon to want to marry him. But one did. It didn't work out...he had high hopes, and the woman herself was hopeful that they should marry each other: she wore a different brightly coloured long shirt and silk hijab every day; she was very fashionable, very well educated; she had no parents, and she was either...twenty-nine or thirty years old.

"How did it end," I asked.

"The woman, I will not tell you her name, said to my teacher something that unraveled him. After six months of progress towards marriage (they had talked about all sorts of things), and meeting her brothers (she had two young brothers), she changed her mind: she said she wanted more time. More time! The man was...very old! I tell you she was unreasonable. I know what you must think: such is life; such is love. This is true, for I thought it too that day. But he could not give her more time; he said to me: 'I don't want to see her face ever again.' I was struck by his complexion. His eyes had a different look. They seemed more awake. He wanted to move out of Cordoba."

"What about the boats...the Amir?" interjected Bilal.

"Ah yes, that's the thing. This break occurred in the middle of all the plans, and we took the boat to the place along the Great River (the Guadalquivir—from the Arabic al-wadi'l kabir), filled it with my teacher's necessary books and things (mostly wooden boxes filled with souvenirs of his youth and what I thought were artwork), and some unique hybrid flowers (he was a botanist, too), and flew West

over the Andalusian clouds. We sent the Amir a letter saying: 'As Salaamu 'alaykum. Sorry about the boats. Maybe next time.'

"That was the boat!" said Bilal. "That boat we found—buried in the black tarry floor—that's the boat you stole—"

"We DIDN'T steal it!" he said standing up.

"No no, I'm sorry," retorted Bilal quickly.

"You could think we did not own it, but I was there—so I know: no one had legal ownership of the boat. It was a secret project; nothing was written down. There were no contracts. The Amir ordered us, eleven people, to be extremely careful. Extreme secrecy—this project! The military ramifications were enormous."

I thought to myself, "where on earth had this strange man come from? Where did he learn all this? Who was he? What was he? Why did Bilal and the rest of us believe him so easily? My answer came simply and straight. He was a man, a true man. He had an immense weight about him. There is no other way to put it: he was heavier than the earth.

"With certainty, they saw us. The boat rose out of the water in the Seville shipyards. It was before Fajr. The few people who saw us must have given word to the Amir, for when we reached the Atlantic and began descending below the clouds to have a look at the scope of the ocean, we noticed a few warships directly below us. They immediately shot at us with some device, impeccably poking small holes in the fabric of our balloon. Our descent was slow but became rapid, and they followed—these three ships of the Andalusian navy—(they knew we had to set down on water, not on land, or else we would die in a crash) right to the point where we were skimming over the water at speed—still not quite in the Ocean...water sprayed on both sides of the white boat when the bottom smacked or cut through water. Every time the bottom of the boat met the top of a rising ocean wave explosions of mist shot in opposite directions beside the boat: flashing phantom wings created by thousands of flying pebbles of water.

“My teacher enjoyed the fact they were pursuing him, an old man: I can still see him laughing with both hands on the back rail of the boat, his beard wet; waving his right hand at the ships. Our balloon—shredded but still a dome above our heads—managed to flutter in the wind all the way to the island.”

“What’s that rumbling.”

“What rumbling?”

“I don’t hear a rumbling...I do hear something, but it’s not rumbling,” I said, worried I was mumbling.

We looked through the doorway (which faced the Ocean) and noticed clean wisps of smoke flying straight into the Atlantic, like ghosts abandoning a ship.

A sustained murmur could be heard around us, distant and terrible. We stepped outside.

The lava warmed the night air. Heat waves in the air came to us alternately with the cool night breezes. A segment of the beach was covered by a black extension, as if from an expanding carpet, and it caused steam to blast upward every time waves hit it. A similar extension of blackish lava would have wrapped up the Masjid had not the placement of the wudu area been between the mountain and the Masjid. A large wall, in jagged tarry clumps and strange black globes (bubbles made of flexible rock), had formed right along the long curving wall we had used to wash up for Salaat. Water from the pipes continued to trickle even at that moment! And when any pipe water met with oozing molten rock, steam and whistling sounds flew. Although slow, the black lava continued to move.

The Command Center was gone. Lava had run over everything in that area. The top of the mountain was now a luminous red dome throwing a turbulent haze in every direction; and the red lava cooled as it flowed down on all sides, setting fire to all the trees, turning black and sluggish by the time it reached the sand on the beach.

Part Four: The Anchor-Woman

We ran madly across the beach, straight as if in a line. We dashed across a long stretch of untouched beach—alhumdoulillah—which led to a boat. Between our line of frantic runners and the boat floating at the end of the crescent of beach, a storehouse sat. Air warmed our right side as the Ocean breeze chilled our left sides. As we never wore shoes in the Masjid, we ran barefoot in the sand.

I broke my leg along the way. Bilal heard me yell and was the first one back. He stood before me, paused for a moment to catch his breath, then in one motion picked me up and carried me to the boat. He ran fast, as if I was not there.

The deck of the boat was high above the beach. Scampering up, dropping me on the deck, and gasping for air, he muttered “–Old Ear.”

After saying this to men scrambling on the deck—he lunged forward, held a trusted man by both shoulders, and let out loudly: “I said, hold here!” The man understood and nodded with the sound of Arabic words coming out of his mouth. Bilal turned around, ran for a length on the deck, stepping on the railing’s horizontal bar for an instant, and took a flying leap across a distance of air. I lost sight of him in the smoke for a second. Looking down through the streams of smoke and vapour, I saw him appear twice (he became smaller running further and further away on the beach) before the grey interference was too much and I could not see him.

The water heated the metal underside of our boat. Steam rose as if from holes in the Ocean. The light of all the lava reflected on puffs of steam rising out from everywhere. It did not feel like night, it did not feel like day.

Everything was moving—the boat swayed, the mist and smoke filled the sky with swirls; the flowing redness contorted as it flowed over the entire island (reaching the ocean in some parts and dividing the beach); but my eye caught a glimpse of one still thing. He was pushing the sphere—but at first I could not tell if the chest-high sphere was moving at all. He rolled it so slowly along the beach. We

screamed at him—'Run up!';—'There's no time!' A few crazy men had started pulling the boat away. And with my leg broken, I ordered some others to go to the front and beat those men away from the controls of the ship!

Should I order men to go help Bilal? Sitting half-sprawled on the deck in my crippled condition, looking at him through rusty vertical bars, I saw him stop and stand. He walked casually back a distance of thirty or fifty feet, and disappeared into the storehouse leaving the round thing alone on the beach. Lava streamed down from everywhere, reaching the storehouse. This house had no wudu facility around it as had the Masjid—no protecting moat.

He ran out of the house with new vigour, and what I first thought was a big blanket. Running along the beach toward the globe he had left, Bilal went around a bulging line of black lava that stretched across the sand. He reached the globe, stood in front of it with his back to the Atlantic. Between him and the burning carpet was only the globe. He stood there for too long—no one would go down now.

Riveted and leaning on the back rail, we sweated as we looked on. Eye-glasses on some faces reflected the excessive yellow and orange colour of the molten rock moving down from the top of the mountain. We kept hearing the sounds of crackling wood and stone bursting under the strain of immense heat. The great quantity of bright orange on the island mesmerised us.

Bilal stood for a long time on the beach using something to unlock the globe as lava accumulated on the opposite sides of it and suffered a tender deflection by the presence of the round object. The interrupted flow of hot rock moved away at an angle on Bilal's right and left. A triangle of ochre sand (on two sides black lava, and on the third the ocean) started forming around the man and the globe.

We kept screaming at him, though he seemed not to hear. It seemed alive, the lava, as if the black crust was lizard leather and the glowing red underneath were hundreds of eyes.

We believed our shouting caused him to move slower. He opened the globe, transferred its contents (what seemed to be

discs-flat yellow circles-golden) into the sack-what I had thought was a blanket-and then the steam between us and him flew up from the bottom of the ship blocking our view.

In a clamorous frenzy of limbs and moving vapours, the men got the tilted ship to set off. We left the shore. We pulled away into the Atlantic; making du'a to Allah that our boat had no holes underneath: praying to Allah that we stay afloat, for we were on our only usable boat.

*

She just wanted it to end. She was tired, but resolute. She heard everything in the room as if she was in another room, hearing through the wall. The News studio buzzed with those words again and again: "going live". She tried to focus her thoughts and her eyes. Her tanned face became as motionless as rock, and only her red lips moved.

"Roger-Roger, what can you tell us about the survivors?" she asked the news correspondent (on the television, we saw one screen with her [the NEWS anchor-woman] talking as if to us, and the image would change to a photograph of a man with a moustache [the NEWS correspondent] set against the background of a map of the Atlantic Ocean).

"There are about fifty of them...they say they are Moslem ar-kye-ologists who were digging when..." some static prompted the woman to interject-

"Roger, we're not hearing you properly-could you repeat...you said there are fifty survivors, and were-"

"They say they discovered...artifacts brought to an island...the island which is the epicenter of this...volcanic [more static]-catastrophe...artifacts...from a place called-Cordoba...Anda-loose."

"Andalusia? Cordoba, Andalusia" she corrected him in wonder, convinced her professionalism slipped. She said in a duller voice, "Did the marines get off of the aircraft carrier in time?"

pleading with her to “GO-on WITH-tha’ nuuuuz!” Her eyes blinked. She recalled an exhibition from her university days called ‘Discover Islam’. “Go’on with-thannuuuz!!” She had an interest in Islam in those days, had studied the basics of Arabic grammar, and learned the Adhaan, which echoed throughout her thoughts in that moment.

The anchor-woman heard him whisper seductively “GONE WITH THE NOOSE!” She realised she was on air.

Looking at us, she asserted, “I testify that there is nothing worthy of worship, except God; and Muhammad is His Messenger! ASH-HADU AN LA ILAAHA ILLA ALLAH MUHAMMAD AR-RASUL ALLAH-

Advance

Montorrahman

Advancing into realms of light
As dark to me as yonder grave,
I seek the friends I held most dear
And find that none but you are here.

But you are here to fill my sight
Although my eyes in error gave
Admittance, by forbidden gaze,
To figures fed with empty praise.

With empty praise of famous men
Pushed forward far by luck or lust
I fumbled farther from the peace
They, too, desire at their decease.

"Cease envying," you warned me, "when
You envy fools whose flimsy trust
In things external helps delete
The feeling of their soul's defeat."

Defeat had bowed me down with years
As quietly as failure can,
But when it whispered once, "Despair!"
I raised my eyes and you were there.

And you were there, though I, in tears,
Bewildered by the wiles of men,
Could hardly recognize your face
Until I saw that changeless grace.

That changeless grace, that ageless smile—
Such as the angels worship—would
Remain in sight though I were blind
And tell my heart that you were kind.

That you were kind—would not denial
Of light itself be understood
More clearly than so feebly say
How you reduce the dark to day?

Today I wondered, when I tripped
Upon my final, foolish pride
What wider minds were thinking of.
I glanced at you and saw but love.

But love alone could not have stripped
Away the fears which long defied
My truthward steps if you had not
Surpassed me far in stride of thought.

Thought jousts with all comparison
In tournaments of guilt and grief
Till you proclaim, "Put down your spear;
There is no other champion here.

No other champion here has won
In any way but deep belief
That the parts men play comprise a whole
In one's own universal soul.

"Soul-satisfied were those who flew
Through nameless lists of former days
And gave, in fame's contempt, to me
Their individuality.

"Duality of 'me and you',
Of 'here and there' at length betrays
Your heart to false yet endless pain
When all is joined in one again.

"Again, in you, I see the sage
I taught, the poet I inspired,
The hero slain at my command,
The saint who held me by the hand.

"The hand of flesh of every age
Is doomed to what it most desired.
The horn sounds freely. Leave your lance.
Unarmed, alone, with me, advance!"

Winner of 2004 Andalusia Prize

Apologies

Nermeen Mouftah

In Mecca, pilgrims throw pebbles at the pillar of Jumrat al-Kubra as a symbol of their struggle against evil.

Mohammed
they threw him from his house
dismantled it brick by brick
and left him a settlement
lonely and hated
he took a match to light
a cigarette and watch
as his roof hit the ground

people of Palestine
I am sorry I doubted you
it is because you are like me
that the guilt of being Arab was too much
so I pinned my shame on your pitiful shoulders
already heavy with the few
possessions strapped to your back
roaming the land in search of your home

Ibrahim
his mother locked him in the house
warning: pebbles never won any wars
she locked front door and back
but when he heard the bullets rattle
he crawled through a window
to join the others with rocks
and when he died they blamed his mother

people of Palestine
I must tell you that it was exciting
to be mistaken for a Greek or Italian
slip into another life to erase you from my thoughts
pretend with all of the others that you do not exist
while you cower on a hillside in your tattered tents

Ishak
went to the market
feeling explosives secured tightly against his chest
he drew his last breath to yell *Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar*

sirens cried for each of the bodies
and later, in my prayers
Allahu Akbar God is the Greatest
but the words do not soothe, they only accuse

people of Palestine
I am sorry that when I speak of you
nobody listens
they see my eyes, my nose, my Sahara sand skin
and dismiss me as subjective
as I see pictures of you in the street beating your chest
burning a stary banner that only hurt you more
wrapped in a scarf
 this is how they define enemy

they taught me to hate myself
 and I did

Winner of 2002 Andalusia Prize

Before The Coming

Montorrahman

As long ago as I can recollect,
I've noticed that the human flesh is specked.
I showed it to my friends. They could not find
A single trace—"It's something in your mind."
Yet as I grew to know of crimes and lies,
Those little blotches grew before my eyes.
With time I saw how every tiny piece
Of evil fell and helped them to increase,
And spread a dirty shadow on the face,
And fashion fell and fastened it in place;
And habits formed a film upon the brain,
And pride appeared to thicken it again;
And falsehood propagated on the heart
A sediment which progress labelled "art,"
But passion called it "love," which power wrote
As "freedom of the people" on their throat;
And greed deposited itself in banks,
And hate on soldiers' helmets, guns, and tanks,
And envy dripped from castles in the air
Upon the lowest, rankest places, where
The water bore a scum of indolence,
Surrounding islands made of ignorance;
And babble congregated in the streets,
And luxury was piled on padded seats,
And whores whom lipstick uses ran in red,
Then white-washed out upon the hotel bed—
And classified corruption on the land,
Bureaucracy to blanket the demand
For justice or relief (it made me sad
To mention it; they said that I was mad);
And flowers bent with virtue's blasted dreams,
And battered children's sobbing choked the streams,
And curses cast to Heaven dammed the seas,
And callous killing coloured every breeze,
Until it did not startle anyone
When atheism blotted out the sun.
Then finally, so overwhelmed by sins,
I seized at people, pointing at their skins:
"Look, here it is! This loathsomeness! Behold!"
At last they saw; their blood, in dread, went cold.

Then Men, with maddened, mindless cries, abhorred,
Revolted at their selves, and Nature roared
In answer, screamed a scream of Doom, and tossed
Us all before the coming Holocaust.

Being on Time

Rebecca Masterton

Maurice de Jour had been working on his masterpiece for about seventeen years. This was the work that would make his name. He had decided to call it *Being on Time*. It was a post-modern amalgamation of transcendental phenomenology, existentialism and deconstructionism. These were no longer the days of Heidegger and Sartre; these were the days of MC Solar and Mathieu Kassovitz. In other words, philosophy was no longer at the Sorbonne; it had dispersed into the streets, mixing with an assortment of historical fragment, which Maurice liked to call 'fragments of time'.

In order to be able to have some peace and finish his work, Maurice was spending his sabbatical in London: West Hampstead, to be precise—that charming corner of the city where one could still go to a café for a civilised cup of coffee and a read of the papers before commencing work. Of course, he had noticed that it was only a five-minute cab ride from there to the not-so-salubrious Kilburn High Road. Its multitude of tat-filled shops, bursting with crowds from every corner of the world, made him frown with consternation, if not fascination. It was a side of life he preferred not to see: cheap, garishly-coloured imported goods for those who could not afford more. It was also a symbol of an age in which social and economic order had, in his opinion, gone tragically awry, threatening the very substance of existence.

Maurice wanted to bring philosophy back to where it belonged: to the realm of great thinkers; of changers of civilisation; of men who knew the art of rhetoric. Not that his intention was simply to make a rehash of ancient Greek values. No. What he wanted was to reinterpret those values in a contemporary way, so that they could be applied in any place and at any time—apart from Kilburn High Road on a Saturday morning.

He had found the perfect place at which to write: a room in a small hotel, whose bay windows overlooked a front garden filled with white rose bushes. When he went out at noon for breakfast, after a

long night's work, the sight and scent of the roses inspired in him a sense of tranquility and a strange yearning that he could not understand, and quickly repressed.

At night, the hours flew by. He sat at a desk at the window, the glow of the computer screen illuminating the ceiling. Only one table lamp was on. Next to him was a cold cup of coffee.

"Gadamer seeks to escape the finitude of existence through historical methodology," he wrote, "but historical methodology can only remain a methodology, a projection of the intellect on to an existence which remains finite."

In the silence of the room, as he contemplated his next sentence, he heard something which sounded very like a sigh. Thinking that perhaps his jacket had slipped to the floor, he turned, irritated at the interruption, to find a tall, weary-looking African man in a green suit, sitting slightly slouched in the little armchair in the corner of the room. The man looked as if he might have been asleep. Certainly his eyelids were closed. Assuming him to be a hotel guest who had strayed through the wrong door, but uncertain of his temperament, Maurice cautiously stood up and slowly turned to face him, but the man remained motionless, his long, slender legs pressed with knees awkwardly together.

Maurice coughed. At this, the man suddenly opened his eyes, which startled Maurice with their powerful, unflinching gaze.

"I do apologise," said Maurice in French.

"I was not asleep," the man replied, also in French, and it was then that, remembering he was in England, Maurice realised he did not have an ordinary situation on his hands, although, for some strange reason, he adopted a manner of scrupulous politeness.

"Ah, ha-ha-ha," he laughed stiffly. "We both speak French. Well, well."

"Indeed," said the man, less amused.

"You do realise, don't you," said Maurice, "that this is actually my room. Perhaps you have it confused with yours?"

“Not at all,” replied the man with disconcerting composure. “I came for a particular reason to see you. How is your wife?”

At this, Maurice, who had been smiling in order to show that he was a reasonable man, felt an inexplicable rage well up inside him and his instinct was to shout at his guest, to order him to get out immediately.

“Who are you? Are you a spy? I demand to know!” he shouted, hands trembling.

In fact, his wife had died nearly a year earlier from alcohol poisoning, although he told everyone that it had been cancer.

This time, it was his guest’s turn to smile. He stood up, towering over Maurice by about six inches, and held out his hand.

“Allow me to introduce myself: I am Shaykh Amadou Thiam. My grandfather knew your grandfather, many years ago.”

“What? That’s nonsense!” scoffed Maurice. “My grandfather was an eminent doctor and scientist. How could he have known your grandfather? Why, he had never even set foot in Africa!”

“He didn’t have to,” replied Shaykh Amadou simply, “for my grandfather had spent a considerable amount of time in France. Actually, he is buried there.”

“What was he doing in France?” demanded Maurice incredulously. “France cannot have had any business with him, that’s for certain.”

“He was in the army,” said Shaykh Amadou, “fighting your war against Germany. You must surely know of the great debt that your country owes to my country, in this respect?”

“In the army,” echoed Maurice. “What was he doing—helping to load up the pack horses?”

“Oh no,” answered Shaykh Amadou, unperturbed by Maurice’s goading. “He worked alongside your grandfather as a field doctor. They were great friends. He used to mention your grandfather a lot in

his letters: what good work your grandfather was doing; how many lives he had saved.”

“Yes,” said Maurice proudly, “he was a great man, my grandfather. He almost died at the Battle of Ypres, trying to rescue a young foot soldier who was drowning in a bomb crater. The lad nearly dragged him down, you see. He was in hospital for a long time after that—shrapnel wounds and pneumonia. They awarded him a medal for bravery.”

“Yes I know, for it was my grandfather who pulled him out of the bomb crater, although unfortunately the young foot soldier had already drowned,” said Shaykh Amadou.

Maurice stared at Shaykh Amadou in astonishment. Then he sneered, “You’re making it up.”

“Why should I do that? Anyway, I have newspaper articles and photographs to prove it, showing my grandfather wearing his medal, which mysteriously disappeared after he was killed in the trenches,” said Shaykh Amadou.

Maurice pursed his lips and narrowed his eyes.

“Are you insinuating...?”

“I am not insinuating anything. I have simply come to ask for my grandfather’s medal to be returned.”

Maurice suddenly could no longer look Shaykh Amadou in the face. His eyes fell to the floor and shifted from side to side. It was true that, unlike Shaykh Amadou, he had no official photographs of his grandfather wearing the medal, just a few family snaps taken in the early ‘sixties, shortly before his grandfather died. Then he hesitated. Supposing this man was making it all up? Supposing he *was* a con-artist?

“How do I know that you are who you say you are? You seem to know something of my family history, but you didn’t know that my wife had died, did you?”

“Oh, I do beg your pardon,” said Shaykh Amadou. “I did not mean your second wife—I meant your first wife. I assumed you must be in contact with her, because of your sons.”

Maurice felt something cold enter his heart. He had guarded the secret of his first marriage and the existence of two sons, whom he had not seen for twenty years, with the zealous determination of a man who could not for one second afford to have cracks in his reputation. He was the celebrated Maurice de Jour, honoured and respected among his peers for his great insights into humanity and human destiny. That he had failed to maintain contact with his children for all those years was not something he desired to advertise.

“I have not seen that woman, or my sons, for more than twenty years,” he growled. “Is that what you are here for, eh? To dig the dirt? It’s none of your business—”

“Your eldest son, Pierre, has my grandfather’s medal,” interrupted Shaykh Amadou. “I merely thought that you could persuade him to give it up to its rightful owner.”

Yes, Pierre had always loved the medal when he was a little boy.

“And how am I to do that? I don’t even know where he is, for goodness’ sake!”

“I will have to leave that to you. He is your son,” said Shaykh Amadou softly. “And how I have to go. I have a large community to take care of back home. I will return when you have retrieved the medal.”

“Back home? You mean in Africa?”

“Yes,” replied Shaykh Amadou faintly. “I am a busy man. I have many responsibilities.”

Imagining the relief he would feel once he had shown the shaykh out, Maurice glanced in anticipation at the door, only to notice that it was locked from the inside, just as he had left it. He began to quiver. Shaykh Amadou looked at him and chuckled.

“You don't know about *buruz*, do you?”

“*Buruz?*”

“The ability to be in more than one place at once. You don't know about that, do you?”

Maurice was unable to answer. He suddenly felt horribly small. The shaykh chuckled again, and as he did so, he grew transparent, his voice seeming to vanish into the distance, with the simple words: “A bientôt, mon ami”. Then he was gone. Maurice stared at the empty space before him and realised that a lifetime's theories and a lifetime's work had just been consigned to the plughole. He wondered whether he was mad, having a breakdown or had really seen what he had seen. He realised, with a terrible fear, that he was sane. And then he thought about his sons and he heard himself utter, in a strange kind of whisper, the word, “Pierre”.

Winner of 2005 Andalusia Prize

Call to Prayer

Corey Habbas

My Military Occupational Specialty was Infantry, and for the majority of my tour I served in Iraq, protecting “assets” vital to National Security. I had only signed up for two years, but they had me for eight years (including inactive reserve duty). That was the law and the wars that they had begun inside of me were tearing me apart.

In the beginning they named the overall mission Operation Iraqi Liberation, or OIL, and then changed it to Operation Iraqi Freedom. They said that the new name was more palatable for the American public. We were told to make our way from the garrison and move on to guard the oil fields, but I would never get there.

A mental apathy took hold of us like a mounting fascism, screaming nationalism, superiority filling us with pride and the colors of our flag until my tattooed chest ballooned and I felt capable of using it as my only shield.

I felt the fervor of invincibility, the electric shock that subdued me. We would all lie back and smoke cloves, not caring, and telling ambitious stories of what we might do when we made it back to the homeland. I wanted to save the world.

I wanted to see my country hold the world in its hands and buffer me from those foreign people that I was too tired, too hungry, too distracted to understand. I got two days off a month. Those days before they sent us, I stayed up late with family, skipping stones in the lake, watching the fire-flies circle around us, those small happy bugs lighting up our faces while we reminisced about things in us that had already transformed.

When I waved goodbye to my brother that day he ignored my hand and embraced me in a way that said all hope in his world depended on me. I knew that his unspoken words would later turn into a self-directive to enlist midway through the war I was sent to fight. He turned 18 in six months, the amount of time I imagined it would take for me to get re-stationed after a successful takeover.

I pictured myself riding a camouflage AM General Humvee through American streets raining with confetti and lined by flags and millions of people above us in tall buildings, leaning out of their windows welcoming us home. I really believed I would be going away to liberate people.

They had spent two years stripping me down, so that I wouldn't be able to feel pride unless it was attached to their pride. They prepared me with jokes, cigarettes and liquor and promises of training and higher education. Once out of Basic Training, my name hit the official list within the ultimate club: United States Marines. They gave us an ego in a package wrapped with nice paper and tied with a pretty bow.

The benches at the bar smelled like beer and the wooden floor, cracked from years by the ocean, melted under our spinning bodies. The room began twisting. This was the time guys usually began to pick each other apart.

I started tossing bottle caps into the ashtrays and nursing the last drops from my bottle. Soon we would have to be getting back to the Squad Bay that housed about sixty of the infantrymen. I didn't need to think. It wasn't part of the job description.

Sam from Illinois, who everyone called Lingo because he could speak four languages, and the only guy not slurring at the table, spilled his water and started rubbing it off on his hair. He had been diagnosed with ulcers, he had said. Since we had known him he hadn't taken a sip of liquor. His white shirt screamed brightly against his brown skin. I could tell Jack, from Arkansas, was eyeing him for a fight, but Sidel from Missouri was there and fights never got very far with him in the room.

"What you're doing isn't normal, Lingo." Jack sneered as he took a quick swig of beer. "Are you sure your one of us?"

"Are you going to start this again?" Sidel asked, pulling himself briefly away from a conversation with five other marines.

Jack paused, ignored Sidel long enough for his side-conversation to resume.

"Where are you from?" Jack asked the same question in a voice deep and low, that hid itself behind the queue ball scratches, jars colliding in toasts and hollers from clear across the room.

"Maybe if you weren't such a mosquito about it he would tell us." I said. Jack ignored me too. I was trying to remember how many beers he had swallowed.

"If you really want to know, Jack, I'm from Chicago." Sam said.

"No, I mean where are you from originally? I don't know how many times I need to ask you the freakin question." Jack's face went from red to really red. "I'm not going to try to segregate from you." Jack emphasized the word segregate.

Sam's last name didn't give anything away. It was generic and melted into the roster like any of our own names. Just the same, the roster had always been filled with poor Whites, poor Blacks and poor Hispanics who had seemingly nothing else to loose by joining the military, maybe even come out better because of having served.

Sam looked at Jack straight in the eye and rattled off something in Spanish that no one could understand.

"Is that my answer? That doesn't answer squat." said Jack.

"You want the exact borders, PIA?" Sam asked without intending to give an answer.

They both paused and I thought a moment for the first time that night. "Seems to me that we may never know the borders Jack." I said. "Borders change all the time. Alaska became a state in 1959. What about Hawaii and Puerto Rico?"

Sam lifted his glass to my bottle and the solid clack flew in all directions, including the direction of Jack's face.

"Are you surprised there's going to be a war?" I finally asked Sam.

"I didn't sign up so that I could go fight a war." Sam said. We were all a little surprised by his honesty.

During nights like these, we could look away into the distractions of other people, watch fights that could have been ours. After nights like these we would wake up and pretend that none of it had ever happened.

It was an acceptance beyond what I had even found in my own family, fights as intense as I had remembered with my own brothers, an acceptance and loyalty that I doubt most people can understand. In this reputable hierarchy of brotherhood, I would have believed anything. The intoxication of it became impervious to any fact or measurement given to attack its objectives. Our pride depended on validity.

I felt like we were in God's hands. I took the Bible that was handed down from my grandfather. Robin's-egg-blue colored chalk marked the lines of his favorite passages, the ones that I would go back to time and time again and stare past the highlighted marks like they were streaks through the sky.

I felt scared for the first time when we left the base for the Middle East, surprising myself with something weaker than I had been trained to feel. When we were flying in by chopper some of the guys were restless too. I couldn't think of any of us as men yet. I couldn't think of myself as a man. At the time I was just some kid that our Master Gunnery Sergeant yelled the word to when we were all standing in formation.

I passed my Bible around and we all silently read from it and each of us watched the one who was reading. It seemed to make us all feel better.

Once it came back to me I flipped through the pages at random and passed it off to my right again, first to Sidel. The chosen passage didn't have the uplifting affect of the previous one, because some of the guys looked restless again.

Once my Bible was back in my hands, I read the selection: "Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God (I Peter 2:16)."

Sam shifted uncomfortably. He skimmed the passage too quickly and passed the book off to Daren Thomas, from Harlem, New York.

Once we were on the ground we had learned that US Central Command had ordered a target on the power infrastructure, so the sewage and water purification systems stopped working and this affected the civilian population. Forces had water rations and civilians started approaching the garrison that had been set up before our arrival. The Staff Sergeant didn't like it and gave orders to shoot anything that moved if warning shots didn't work.

Activity levels remained high. We began shifting things around to organize the garrison or maybe to wait for other orders and to keep ourselves busy. Irritation built up in us from the heat and the uncertainty. We knew only what we had to know, and most of the time that wasn't enough. Hot wind had begun to move against the front of the garrison, pushing me back and something I didn't have the energy to protest.

An un-embedded reporter named Holloway stopped and rested by one of the supply crates near us.

"We don't have provisions for un-embedded reporters." Sidel hollered from behind the cargo truck he was unpacking.

"I'd rather not pay for provisions with censorship, thanks," said Holloway with a bitter laugh.

I leaned in. Quietly Holloway fed us more of what we had been craving. "They're saying the war is over. They've taken Baghdad."

Sam asked, "How many civilian casualties? Have—"

"Who cares. How many soldiers died?" Jack interrupted.

"Ah. Spoken with the humanitarianism of a soldier," Holloway said. "I wonder if you'll ever be graced with someone breaking into your home and setting everything a-fire?"

Something Holloway had said registered with Sam because I could tell he was thinking about it the way someone might think about blasting through a red light.

"So what is it?" Jack pressed.

"The bottom line? The end that justifies your means?" I casually said through the suffocating heat that seemed too thick to penetrate.

"Whose side are you on?" Jack demanded. "This jerk shows up and we can see your true colors now."

"The range of civilian casualties are 5,430 to 7,046 and 210 U.S. and coalition deaths," answered Holloway.

Jack walked away in triumph and began watch at one of the posts.

"I hear they're also bringing in missionaries from Samaritan's Purse to tell the Iraqi's about Jesus," I said and it had been days since I had opened my Bible.

"Iraqi's already know about Jesus." Sam said with a conviction that took me off guard. "Jesus is one of the Muslim prophets."

"Oh. Sorry, I didn't know." I said.

I was too tired to ask any more questions out loud. How could the war have ended? Who had it ended for? The sand kept pushing me back as if I were striving to go somewhere. It covered my fatigues, wearing them down into my skin and I burned with the friction of earth and the late afternoon sun.

Shots fired. Remnants of sound reverberated through parched air. Sam and I removed our M16A2 Rifles from our shoulders and forced on to Jack's station without thinking, listening to the echoed steps behind us, our bodies shot with adrenaline only caused by the uncertainty of hearing a weapon discharge without advanced knowledge.

After I saw that Jack was standing, I took a 180-degree view of the surrounding area. Past Jack stood a building that had been emptied before our arrival, the only noteworthy object until I focused my attention to the ground where sand currents had persisted in raising throughout the day.

Wisps of her long black hair blew loosely from underneath a thin scarf. Their bodies composed a mass of unifying weight on the desert ground. Except for the baby, neither the woman nor the older child was moving.

The small, pink headband around the baby's head started to slide off. The baby's mouth opened without sound. It felt like time stopped while she moved and we waited for someone to shoot her again. The sand blew over her small struggling movements, colored her hair and skin with crushed desert powder. When the initial shock had worn off, she began crying.

When I couldn't look at her anymore I forced myself to look at Jack. He froze; his face and body tight, waiting. He didn't go towards the baby. He didn't turn away. He didn't move. I couldn't make sound come out of my throat. I tried. I started to cough. I couldn't stop.

I wanted to run anywhere. I couldn't see. I felt my hands in the sand. Another shot rang out. Someone had fired on the baby a second time. Then I heard shots blasting in our direction and I picked up my rifle. Sam stood beyond the baby and was shooting, just shooting with no purpose. Jack went down. Sidel went down. Then Sam started running toward the building. I ran hard, not knowing why I was running, not knowing if I was going to shoot Sam, if I should shoot Sam.

Running between the garrison felt like I was running a race where the destination remained tentative and my duty was just to run. I followed Sam, guessing toward my next action, either covering for him or in pursuit of him, although he was hard to keep up with, wandering through the building of men and women and families who stared empty at us and sitting down in bunches when we entered and left.

I lost track of Sam. He may have been running from me and I collapsed next to a kneeling man who didn't seem to notice. His wife offered me tea and I listened to the words her husband was saying, words full of strength and dignity that I don't even know how I understood. "Pardon them and forgive; God loves those who do what is beautiful (Qur'an 5:13)" and I remember thinking that this is not who they told me I would be fighting.

disconnect

Asmaa Hussein

take

me to a place where I can hear the wind
in dimmed lights and through beaded curtains
pushed apart by the breeze of my
movement. I'll buy a quill and pad and ink
from the cluttered quiet Arab shop on
the street down from us. The smell of musk and
sound of jovial children overpower me.

to

and fro I walk on that narrow street
from the first time. Watching flowers
bud wilt die bud
and the tree branches being undressed,
reaching out to me.

change

is inevitable, I know. Walk over unpacked escaped mud
being pushed to a side on that
same first street. Strands of your hair
flitting in my mind. Mine in the wind. The
street is hollow, echoes not my voice, my thoughts.
repeats repeats repeats—it never stops

rain

patters onto the dusted sidewalks—I
want to step under it, to protect just one spot
of this street—but rain trickles into the crevices
and removes every memory of you.
and the wind steals my echoed thoughts, holds them
to her bosom. Presses them into these lines.
it's a wind that follows me into my dreams.
I will lead you down this garden path
and abandon you.

The Dove

Montorrahman

My neighbour kept a dove within a cage.
I noticed that this dove had reached a stage
Where freedom was an other-worldly space,
A breathed belief, a passion, not a place.

He would not take the perch above his head,
But squatted down in silence on his bed
Of excrement and feathers vainly spent
In winged revolt against imprisonment.

The other birds, inured since birth to be
Confined, would feed and sing and sleep, but he
Would not acknowledge that to be a dove
Meant cooing, after meals, peace and love
To please his master and confirm a place
Unnatural for him and all his race.

How could he know of nature, or the life
Which proved itself in pure and perfect strife?
The potent wing, the pointed beak, the claw
Were clear commandments, half a dual law.
The other half was written on the breeze,
The insects, fruit, and branches of the trees.

Brought up, but not created, for a cage,
He heard the morning rain and felt the rage
Of elements responding to the Lord
Within his heart profounder, more adored
Than any human system proudly planned
Upon pragmatic grounds and not the land.

Reality released is life expressed
As self-conscious joy, but if oppressed,
It takes its life in real misery,
Not sotted songs nor brainless gaiety.

And so this dove in mute defiance sat,
Not caring what his stare was angled at,
And saw the hopeless tragedy of birds
Who cannot have the afterlife of words.

For he was not a bird of paradise
Whose owner mourns his loss with loving sighs,
Nor free, to leave that freedom to his young,
Who carry on the song that he had sung.

He was not worth the notice of a name.
His master bought him cheaply, just the same
As he had bought some score of birds before.
They ate and aged and then were fed no more,
But flung, forgotten, on the garbage heap
And rotted in the dirt (for they were cheap).

Perhaps these grim forebodings gave him pain;
Yet he was quiet when I looked again.
His feathered breast was pressed against the bars,
And where there should have been the double stars
Of life—his eyes, or tears—I saw instead
Two lines of drilling ants. My dove was dead.

$$E=mc^2$$

Jibril Hambel

What is this frenzy among the dying
To move to warmer climes?
Haven't they heard of the great heat death
And worldlines run amok in cones of light?

Absolute zero, and all your toy soldiers
Have gone home
Abandonment your last sacrament
but one.
You will not declare an undying love;
A war bride faces death in a mirror.
You will lose faith in "Everything is Relative"
(An absolute)
And tend to other's wounds-
for a time

Where was that hour of change when
The density of things left you barren, afraid?
The somnolent ticking of twilight is a
Century of panic to one
Who never regrets,
The fires set
To punish memory have no recourse but
To blacken your dreaming as well-

And so it is to those who dabble with constants
Which the wise man chooses to call repetition
"Rise and go forth" may be the substance of myth
As well as the secret of beginnings

But then,
The speed of light holds no terrors
For those unafraid of shadow

Elements

Ahmad Thompson

Underneath the evening sky
I stood on the black cold dusty lava
That covered the rim of the old crater
Of a volcano which was still erupting,
In a more subdued manner now,
Only down in the depths of its dark bowl,
But still hurling glowing rocks
Far up into the deep dark blue sky,
Hanging there briefly,
Before falling down like golden rain drops
Shaken from a giant invisible tree,
Clattering and pattering on the uneven slopes below,
And glowing for a while in the growing darkness.
Every few minutes, the rushing sound
Of a steam engine in a tunnel,
Louder and louder,
Until it appeared,
Up and up into the air,
The red and yellow and orange splashes
Of hissing colour
Brighter than the stars,
And then shining even brighter,
As the shadow of the earth
Passed over the face of the full moon
In a total lunar eclipse
Which clothed the night in darkness,
As a tremendous shooting star sailed across the sky,
And then faded into nothing.
And still I was curious,
And wanted to see more,
And preparing myself
For what was to come,
I waited for the right moment,
And then started running
As soon as one eruption had ceased,
Running, sliding, surfing down the loose stones,
Down to the black hole's edge,
To stare death insolently in the face,
Peering down,
Not into the seething molten lava

That I had been expecting,
But into a black dark void
That belched out awful sulphur fumes
And rumbled menacingly from its depths.
For one precious moment
I paused,
Feeling wonderfully alive,
Looked up at the moon and the shining stars
And then down again into the mouth
Of this danger filled dark emptiness.
And then I was off,
In love with life,
And wanting to stay alive,
Scrambling up over the sliding rocks and dust
In the darkness,
Excited and panting and not knowing for sure
Whether I would reach safety
Before the next molten rain storm
Gushed out and up and all around.
But God was merciful to me in my recklessness,
And when the next eruption came
I was high up on the old rim again
And out of reach of the hungry fire,
Trying to find a comfortable place among the rocks
To sleep the night away
Until dawn came,
Lighting up the sea that spread around to the horizon
In every direction wherever you looked,
Until it was light enough
To find my way down the mountain side
Through lava-land,
Then jungle-land,
And seaside-land,
Until I was back at my camp site,
Sitting cross-legged on my sleeping bag in the shade,
Surrounded by the sweet perfume of a lemon grove,
And drinking cool clear water from a nearby spring,
As I ate freshly baked bread and newly picked peaches.
Many many years ago,
This was,
Perhaps even before you were born,
One summer
On Stromboli,
On a journey through life.

Finding Him

Eiman Abdelmoneim

The man wearing the orange jump suit
taking a deep breath, pausing;
out of the darkness and into the light, a fruit
borne from a late autumn tree blooming.

Young Joseph found Him, abandoned
in the solitude of the well
Jonas, in the belly of the whale, yearned
for Him to answer his call.

Emerging from his tiny, dull cell block
led by a burly guard frowning.
A wounded bird with clipped wings, stuck
in a wooden box, aged and browning.

But like Malcolm, he found Him here
The One who said "*If they ask you about Me, tell them I am near*"

Honourable Mention 2002 Andalusia Prize

Green Broken Down

Corey Habbas

A box of oils. A hand-stretched canvas. Green, in the hue of mint: the night's steeping impasse before Khalil put his brush down- they split his handle into 4 pillars. Imploded locks, splintered rubies. The prolonged tremble of oolong and the ghosts of boot prints. The city whose imprint fades in the painting that dropped from the prayer room wall in his house. They can't take the 5th. They can take what he painted, but they can't take what he can still paint.

He could paint their eyes how he saw them- parochial red, peerless, confused boys and their leaders- narrow, parental and devolved from equity, but Khalil never tried to compete with Paradise. He never painted them- the men of entitlement. Their black-eye delivery- his relative wealth, next to soldiers pitching tents in the desert; their green eyes scanning for glory. They can't take his prayers; any of them.

Shinkay's silhouette. Arabesque hair. Her kesh dress. Complexity unto which she gave herself. Why had she married him? Pickled tang of his green olive bread. Contour of olive branches he stretched in graphite across the synagogue, church and masjid of the Holy Land sky-scape. No matter that she had never been there.

Together they had made lush vegetable gardens; sheen beyond spring and producing a spectrum of love's accomplishments.

Her last night they lived like animals- watched each other through the flare of grenades pirouetting to a blared sound track from a tank. Her brown topaz eyes in the wrong light used to look green. Brass and copper turn green with age. Subjects avoid light. Blind contour drawing. Shinkay- fading from infrared detection. Khalil as he sees her encased in shadow, and so he paints her shadow. They can take his Qur'an, and paint it with their yellow, but they can't take The Qur'an away.

Khalil doesn't know how long
her body waited before he could bury her
but he could count the time in color.
After black shrapnel dispersed.
After the rose of seven Maghrib salah.
After the color of it drained from her
skin to mineral lime. Blood in her
veins looked green until they cut her.

Paint dies. Khalil knows this.
If the ocean were ink,
if the ocean were ink,
if the ocean were ink.

Naïve armies try to compete
with the green of Paradise. They try to paint the dying world
in victory colors, but the paint cracks and chips.

Serpentine jade of a ruler's palace. Emerald city flakes. Living
in the United States is easy. Boxed crates branded on a barge.
Broken
wood on the sandy grand opening. It's like riding on a lion's back
as it hunts down a gazelle, and Khalil is a young gazelle
watching the mother of his children die.

The only thing green in this city are the golf courses.
A woman cocks her wrist, dangles her painted fingernails
over the passenger sill of a matching forest-green Mercedes.
Colors have speed. Orange speed cones
line the streets for the reckless, with the red cones
of the eye, he can see green.

Purple hearts with oak-leaf-cluster pound
in the chests of tin men. Bronze stars can't light up the sky
forever. They can't take The One, but one day, unlike they
have taken Shinkay, they will all be taken; xanh
like the leaves.

The Hour Glass

Jibril Hambel

We felt so rich, had days, hours, seconds saved
Up for a future if not endless then most
Certainly interminable-a long stretch of black
Ribbon highway cross a desert of our imagining
We've had our share of plagues and centennial
Wars I think to last a lifetime and then
Some; a little dirt in the mix is fine but
Enough is enough if one is able to
Maintain polite conversation without, I hope,
The usual cocktail of psychotropics which
Made living one long though uneventful and
Dated newsreel, so ancient and out of touch
It is still black

and white, like infant
Souls or virgin snow which our boots have not
Turned to slush and grey and hatefulness
By our rude and outspoken living, coarse
Forgetful beasts that we are-

Can you deny you were intentionally distant
When we cashed our last traveler's checks and
Set out cross that very unimaginal desert
Whose constant simmering turned blue skies white?

You thought we had time and neither war
Nor plague would touch us, never looking
Behind at the ghostly shadows thrown by
Streetlamps thru swaying trees in the first
Violent winds of spring

You thought
You had time to make today last
Forever, to grow into your dreams like
Children grow into clothing too large
At first but with time fit snug, then-
Too much, too tight, discard
(Along with everything else)
The hope that all will
Turn out, if not well

Then at least
Bearable.

Making Maklooba

Sara Umm Zaid

The news exploded in her head like a bomb. Dead, dead, from a dum-dum bullet. Everything turned upside down when “Your son’s been...” The whole world imploded. She had seen olive trees torn from the earth by wild-eyed fanatics. “So, this is how it feels when one’s roots are pulled up,” she thought. It wasn’t the first time she had been faced with such news. She was tired of being left behind to pick up the pieces.

It was the middle of term, and her son had won a prize at school. He asked her to make maklooba. It was his favorite. Her maklooba was the best in the camp, and she was famous for it. People asked her to cook it for them at weddings, at aqiqas, at birthdays, any occasion was an occasion for her maklooba. Fried cauliflower, potatoes, and eggplant, layered in a pot with rice and chicken, then turned upside down on a giant silver platter. If the maklooba held the shape of the pot, it was a success. If everything fell apart into a big pile, she’d done something wrong. Her maklooba always held the shape.

She had been cutting the cauliflower to fry when they came to her door. She forgot about the vegetables on the table.

Reporters and cameras crammed into her tiny home, a cinderblock square with a corrugated tin roof. The bright lights on the camera highlighted cracks in the cement walls and floor. The cement floors were spotless, she scrubbed them every morning. The well-worn furniture was clean, and free of dust. Family portraits hung in frames on the walls. Waxy plastic flowers sprang from a white vase on a scratched, but polished wooden coffee table.

Sitting with her on the couch were her brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, her cousins. Also present was a Palestinian National Authority representative, here to act as a buffer between the Mother of the Martyr and the media. But where was her oldest son, the coolness of her eyes? In America, unable to return. Like all of her children, gone, and unable to return.

Her first born child, a son, was born when her husband was suffering from a bout of patriotic fever. Falasteen ibn Nasir. Palestine, son of Nasir. She was forever stuck with the kunya of Umm Falasteen, Mother of Palestine. From the moment he'd known she was expecting, Nasir told anyone who would listen that he would name his first born child Falasteen or Falasteena. She hadn't taken him seriously until he came home with the official birth certificate. How she'd complained to her sister while he was away at work. She was familiar with names of Prophets, or names from the Qur'an. What sort of name was Falasteen for a Muslim child?

She never called him by this name, and to the family, he was always known as Khalil. After the birth of her son, only her husband and her brothers and sisters knew her as Sabirah, the name her parents had given her. The reporters knew nothing of this name. The PA authority man proudly announced her kunya to them. She flinched when the reporters called it out, even though she could barely hear them through the thick mud of grief.

"Umm Falasteen, are you willing to sacrifice more of your children for Yasir Arafat, for the nation of Palestine?"

"Umm Falasteen, do you wish death on the Israeli soldier who killed your son?"

"Umm Falasteen, do you wish to see the destruction of the Jewish people?"

"Umm Falasteen, did you encourage your son Junayd to throw rocks at the Israeli soldiers? Did you want him to be a martyr for Allah?"

No, yes, no, no...how many of them could she give?

Junayd was the youngest of her seven, a surprise from Allah, fourteen years younger than her youngest daughter. Her husband died when Junayd was less than a year old. She raised him with a patchwork of brothers, sisters, and cousins.

The fire of Abu Falasteen's *fidayeen* spirit had been extinguished with the news that Amal, their oldest daughter, was dead in Lebanon.

Tens, hundreds, thousands, just like her. Rocket attack, mortar attack, air strike, cross fire, car bomb. She never asked for the details of Amal's death. Knowing she was dead was the only thing important to Umm Falasteen. Abu Falasteen died of a heart attack five years later, but those close to him knew he died on that day in 1982.

He had been working on an Israeli construction site, helping to build a settlement for the extremist who wished to force them out of even the miserable camps. The hard labor was not worth the few shekels he was paid, but without it, what would they eat? They no longer had the wheat fields, the gardens, the olive groves to sustain them. Umm Falasteen remembered his fellow workers coming by after the funeral. Between them they had raised a few hundred shekels for her. They all had families themselves, and to this day, she appreciated the sacrifice they had made for her.

Amal was the searing pain of a burn, Abu Falasteen a dull ache, and Junayd was being violently uprooted. Today, the gash on her chest had been reopened, and she gasped from the pain she felt when she pressed her fingers there.

When the reporters and the cousins and the neighbors and the Palestinian Authority man left, she returned to the kitchen, to her maklooba and her memories.

She was born in a small village near Haifa, in 1948, the year of the Nakba. She was the tenth of twelve children. She was less than a year old when they landed here in this miserable refugee camp. Most of her older brothers and sisters fled to Jordan, where they lived now as citizens, prosperous, stable, in their own homes, on their own land. She was raised on UN rations and tales of how things were. The olive groves, the fields farmed by her father, her grandfather, her grandfather's father...Tales told so often, she knew what the soil would feel like between her fingers. She knew who lived next door to whom, and it was as if she had spent her childhood playing in the streets there, instead of in this wretched camp. To this day, she

could close her eyes and see the village as it had once been. It was more familiar to her than this place.

At fourteen she married Nasir, the son of a distant cousin from the same village. He was patriotic, passionate about the land, a would-be fighter who settled for working as a mechanic in Ramallah. He attended jumu'ah, and fasted Ramadan, but he didn't pray regularly, and he was more interested in talking nationalism than reading the Qur'an. She did not care to talk politics, or to listen to the people argue over which party was the best. She read the Qur'an everyday, and sent her children to the masjid after school to learn tajweed.

At fifteen, she became mother to Falasteen, the first of her seven children. She remembered those long days before he came. She would lie in bed in the afternoons, wondering about the pain. She would stay awake at night, wondering what he would look like, when he would walk, what his first word would be. Her whole life, she'd been taught how to be a wife and a mother. She never expected anything different, and probably wouldn't have known what to do with herself if she'd gotten it.

Amal came the next year. Seven children she had raised in this place, and now, all of them were gone, in one way or the other.

Falasteen was the first to leave, off to college in America, to become a teacher of English. And then he married, and had children, and became an American citizen, and lived in an American style home in the suburbs of New York City, and spoke English and ate American food. He called her every Friday, and asked when she would do him the honor of coming to live in her home. He spoke of the opportunities Junayd would have in America, the things he couldn't do in the West Bank. It was like a game between them. Every week he begged her to come, and every week she repeated the myriad of excuses why she couldn't leave this land.

And after Falasteen, her children came of age, and left, one by one, to catch livelihoods unavailable here in the West Bank, here with their mother. Off to the Gulf to become engineers and computer

scientists, to Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon to work as journalists and teachers, to Brazil to work as businessmen. Her daughters married agreeable Palestinian and Jordanian men, mild-mannered men who wore khaki pants and wire rimmed glasses. Only Amal married a fighter, a man with the rebellious spirit of her father.

Amal was a mirror of her father in his youth. She was passionate, intelligent, she cared about the land and her people. At fourteen, she was working at the PLO newspaper. She came home speaking of revolution, of the right to return, of justice and jihad. At sixteen, she was married to a Fatah fighter from Al Quds named Nidal. With his black and white kiffaya wrapped around his neck, he seemed mysterious to Umm Falasteen, the wife of a would-be farmer, a would-be fighter.

For Abu Falasteen, Nidal was everything he couldn't be. With children and a young wife to care for, he could never bring himself to join the fighting. Abu Falasteen was entranced by Nidal's tales of raids, of combat with the Israelis, of strategies, and plans, and revolution, and freedom for the land. This man who would not fight himself for fear of his family was more than happy to give his most beloved child to a mujahid.

At night, Umm Falasteen would whisper her worries to Abu Falasteen. "And what happens when he leaves her a widow? And what happens when he leaves her with small children to care for? And what happens...and what happens?"

"And what happens? We will be grieved, she will be grieved. It will be hard. But he is right for her, and what he does is right for our people." And that was that.

Amal was excited to go to Lebanon, to work with the refugees there, to work at the newspaper. Umm Falasteen could never fathom how her daughter could thrive in such a place as Beirut, and she begged her to come home to Palestine, or to go to Jordan, where she would be safe. But after a year, and then two, Umm Falasteen began to relax, to believe that her daughter was protected,

somehow, from the madness that had taken root in the Lebanese heart.

After the invasion came the news that Amal, and the child she carried in her womb, were dead. And no one was ever the same after that.

They pulled themselves together, because they had other children, they had no choice. And yet, there were times when she felt she was being pulled, feet first, into something which threatened to suffocate her. There were so many nights she was startled awake by the sudden, subconscious realization that the space next to her was empty. She would find her husband sitting in the living room, in the dark, staring at the walls. The pain dulled as the years went by, but it never went away. She went on as she had before, although she still had days where getting out of bed was a struggle. She didn't want to leave. The land was the only thing she found comfort in for many years. Her husband began to pray.

Junayd caught them by surprise, at the end of 1987, 14 years after she'd had what she thought was her last child. She remembered how sweet he was, the softness of his skin, the fresh smell of his head. She loved to lie in bed with him in the mornings, his tiny fingers grasping one of hers. At night, he slept in his cradle next to Abu Falasteen, who would wake up periodically and check to see if he was still breathing. It had seemed to her that Abu Falasteen's grief had been lifted, but then came the news that his heart attacked him on the Isra'ili construction site.

After that she established her own life, as much as a widow and mother of 7 in the refugee camps can. She raised the rest of her children, made sure they went to college, made good marriages. She sat at the table with them, supervising their homework, even as she was unable to understand most of it. She visited with her sister everyday. They would drink tea and coffee, and her sister would share the latest gossip of the camp with her as they sewed and embroidered. At night she would sit in her living room, reading the Qur'an until her eyes felt heavy. Those were the years of the Intifada, before peace deals were signed. She remembered the curfews, the

general strikes. She saw the spirits of her neighbors being revived. Palestinian flags would appear high atop power lines or in trees, where it was difficult for the soldiers to take them down. Graffiti promoting a free state of Palestine was plastered onto the side of every home.

One night, her son Rami came home, battered and bruised. He told her that a group of Isra'ili soldiers on patrol had cornered him while he was walking home from his tajweed lessons after school. One of them beat him while his comrades egged him on and laughed at Rami's cries. Had Rami been throwing stones? He denied it, but she knew that he sometimes did, like all of his friends. As she tended to her son's cuts, something in her welled up. It was one of the few times in her life that she was enraged. Even as she grew angrier and angrier, she knew that she was relatively fortunate. All over the West Bank and Gaza, mothers like her were losing their sons to bullets, to administrative detention, where they would languish in prisons for months and months, on charges of being Palestinian, enduring torture at the hands of the *Shin Bet*. Sometimes they would be convicted and sent to a prison camp in the Negev desert, far from their families and friends. If they hadn't been radicals when they went into the prisons, they were when they returned home.

The next day, she was walking home from the market in Rahmallah. There were some teenagers throwing stones at the soldiers. Without thinking, she set her bags down and picked one up. Her hands were tough and work worn, but they felt smooth and soft with this jagged stone in them. She stared at the stone cupped in her hand, before she stretched her arm back behind her head as far as she could and hurled the stone with all of her strength towards an Isra'ili army jeep. She watched as the stone sailed through the air against the sky and landed against the hood of the jeep. Then she picked up her bags and continued walking home.

As her children grew up and moved away, they begged her to come live with them, but she resisted their pleas. How could she live in Lebanon, the land of her daughter's death? How could she go to

Jordan, or Syria, or Brazil, or the Gulf? How could she leave this land, which she had always known, which her father had always known, which her grandfather had always known? Where else did the air taste like this? Where else did a rock feel like this in your hands?

It was late, she realized with a jolt. She'd fried the cauliflower, the eggplant, the potatoes. She set them aside. She would finish the maklooba tomorrow, the day of her son's funeral. Her brothers had driven to the hospital and taken her son's body out the back door before the Isra'ilis could steal it away and force her to bury him at midnight, when no one would know to grieve for him.

Falasteen sat in his living room, in his home in Scarsdale, New York. The only light came from a street lamp outside. A mug of steaming hot tea with thyme was on the table next to him. In his hands, he held a framed photo of his brother. He heard his wife's footsteps on the stairs, and turned to see her sleepy face. Her hand rested on his shoulder. "Khail, are you coming to sleep?"

He covered her hand with his. "Soon, *habibti*, soon. Go back to bed. I'm okay."

"Are you sure?"

He nodded, and listened to her footsteps fade away, the click of the shutting door.

He'd never spent much time with his youngest brother. His early years were the years of the Intifada, and it was difficult for him to return home, to see his young compatriots throwing themselves on the line of fire, while men such as himself stayed behind. A few times since Oslo, he'd made the trip, once with his wife and children. He'd planned to return this year, for Ramadan, but the Al Aqsa Intifada took them all by surprise. He remembered with a shudder the sneers on the faces of the Isra'ili customs officers when they read his passport, with his official name. "Falasteen?" They would shake their heads, and meticulously inspect every item in his suitcases, holding

his socks and his camera up to the light for inspection while he sat in a battered plastic chair for hours.

He remembered when a Jewish colleague saw his real name in a department publication. "Falasteen? I thought your name was Khalil."

"My legal name is Falasteen, but my mother calls me Khalil." He watched his colleague's face as he searched his memory for the meaning of that name, and he saw his colleague's face turn red and then purple as he realized what it meant.

"Well, I certainly can see why you'd prefer to be known as Khalil," he said before retreating from his office with a flimsy excuse about grading papers.

He shook his head and let out a small laugh as he remembered how people always reacted strangely when he told them he was from Palestine.

"Khalil? What kind of name is that? Are you from Egypt?"

"No, I'm from Palestine." He was slightly amused by the way that they would immediately shift their eyes down, as though he was a fearsome fighter for Yasir Arafat, instead of an English professor from Westchester County. The questions they would ask ranged from the intelligent and sensitive to the ridiculous and offensive.

"Do you want to kill all Jews? Why can't you just share the land? Don't you think they have a right to be there, too? Why do your people believe in bombing innocent people? Don't your people value life? I mean, what do you expect them to do when those kids are throwing rocks at them?" *Those* kids. And now his brother was one of those kids. They should ask Ariel Sharon these questions. Unconceivable to him that this man was somehow involved in the deaths of his brother and sister, eighteen years apart.

The phone rang. It was his brother Rami calling from Amman. "Salaam Alaikum."

"Wa laikum salaam."

"How are you doing?"

"As well as can be expected. What's happening?"

"They're showing his funeral on TV. I thought you might be able to see it on your satellite channels."

He turned on the TV and saw his brother being carried through the streets, his body covered by a Palestinian flag. He knew this was his Uncle Mazin's doing. He was a staunch supporter of Yasir Arafat, of Fatah, of nationalism, even after he had been betrayed time after time, at Oslo, at Wye River...His mother never would have approved of the flag of Palestine being draped over her son's body. Whatever love of nationalism she had was gone after Amal. He knew she would have wanted only the simple white shroud of Islam.

He watched as Palestinian security forces shouted slogans and fired their guns in the air. He watched the Hamas men in their thobes, singing nasheeds about jihad, as they walked arm in arm with the procession. He saw his uncles and cousins following the procession, their grief poured out onto the streets of the West Bank.

When the picture changed to show his mother in her home the day before, a sigh of sorrow and longing escaped him. She was surrounded by her brothers and sisters, her cousins, her nieces and nephews. And that parasite from the Palestinian Authority, trying not to smile like the Cheshire Cat as he introduced her to the world as "Umm Falasteen."

His mother looked frail, old. Her eyes were sunken, and her skin was gray against her black thobe. His stomach tightened into a knot of guilt. What was he doing here in Scarsdale, while his mother grieved in Palestine? When did she get so old?

Falasteen came to America for college when he was 18. He met Hanan his senior year, at a lecture about Lebanon and Palestine given by the Arab Student's Association. She was Muslim American, a computer science major. This was something new for him. All of the women he'd known as a child were mothers and wives. He found her intelligence intriguing.

After graduation, he found that he could not bear to return to Palestine, nor could he bear to live without Hanan. So he signed up for graduate school and married her. He became an American citizen, secured a job teaching English to American college students. They bought a home in a cushy suburb of New York City.

He didn't return to religion until his first child was born. He would look at his daughter sleeping so blissfully in her mother's arms, and he couldn't allow her to face the future without the same moral bearings his mother had given him, through Islam. He started praying, and going to the masjid on Fridays. He bought Islamic cartoon tapes for his children, taught them Qur'an after dinner.

Over the years, he would send photos and videos of the kids, make phone calls every week. But he couldn't bring himself to return, not even for a short visit. Not until his father died did he return. He was depressed from the moment he landed there until the moment his plane touched ground back in New York. He didn't understand why his mother remained so stubborn after his father died. Why wouldn't she just leave?

He should have tried harder to convince her to move here. There was a room upstairs for her. He'd made sure when they bought this house that it had enough bedrooms for his family, his mother, and his brother. But what was the point of having these rooms if they sat empty, waiting for their inhabitants to come?

His stomach seized and cramped so that he thought he might vomit. He remembered a saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him), that the mother deserved a son's company three times more than the father. And then he remembered his mother, alone in that refugee camp, alone with her distress.

He turned off the TV. He'd had enough of watching the various political factions jockey for the position of most righteous at his baby brother's funeral.

Umm Falasteen stood before her stove, layering chicken, vegetables, and rice in a huge pot. She'd watched Junayd's funeral on the television, saw her son draped in a Palestinian flag. No doubt the work of her brother Mazin. She was shocked to realize that she felt anger as she watched security forces fire off their guns into the air, and Hamas men singing nasheeds Junayd the Martyr. Who were these people? She didn't know them, and they did not know her son. Her sister had come by at fajr, and told her there was already a portrait of her son on the wall at Martyr's Square. Islamic Jihad had vowed to avenge her son's death. "Enough!" she raised her hand in front of her face. She couldn't stand to hear anymore.

She couldn't stand anymore of this place. As she watched her son being carried to his grave, she renounced her ties to the soil. The connection she'd always felt between her heart and this land was severed. She felt like a bird, able to take flight at will.

The telephone rang. From the other end, she heard the voice of her son Falasteen. Her heart leapt when she heard his voice cracking. "Mama? Please come. Hanan and I want you to come. The children want you to come. Come here and we will take care of you. You will have no worries here. If you don't want to come here, then go to Rami, or go stay with Maha. But please don't stay there anymore, ya Ummi. We are so worried for you."

Umm Falasteen looked at the pictures of her children on the wall. She looked at her hands, cracked, and worn from years of work, but never the work of the land. She looked around her small home, the cinder block walls, the cement floor, the tin roof. She remembered her parents, and their stories of the way things had been. She remembered Abu Falasteen, Amal, Nidal. She remembered the wars she had lived through, the hope she felt when Junayd was born, when the Intifada was born. She thought of the images she'd seen of Junayd this morning. She thought of the Hamas men singing nasheeds, of the Authority men shooting in the air, of the television people shouting out her name.

Her children had been calling to her, and she answered. "I will come."

She sat in the airport with her brothers and sisters, her nieces and nephews, waiting for her plane to board. She was wearing a fringed white scarf, and her best thobe. It was black, with embroidered rainbow colored flowers on the bodice and the hem. It had taken her and her sister weeks to finish it. She had splurged, and on her feet she wore stiff, new leather shoes. In her bag, she carried a bottle of water, a Qur'an, her travel documents, and a paper with Falasteen's phone number.

Her flight was announced, and she stood to say goodbye to her brother and sisters, her nieces and nephews. Hugs, kisses, tears. Sorrow and jealousy. Her sister hugged her, and whispered in her ear, "Oh, but I shall miss you, ya Sabirah."

She boarded the plane, ready for flight.

Winner of 2001 Andalusia Prize

The Moon of Shawwal

Adnan Ashraf

There he is
The moon of Shawwal
Sitting steady
Over the city of Jeddah

Parents are far. No worries tonight,
After the rain
The day was delightful
And the night air is a source
Of contentment.

Thanks be to Allah
For answering their prayers
And blessing us with a measure
Of sweet weather

In this hot land, in this new home
Far from one's past, one can forget
A breeze's cool beauty
And the depth of true friendship

Until he shows his face again
The moon of Shawwal
Unlike the silver coin of New York
He shows the color of his golden bride

Recalling to heart the simplicity of life
The vastness of the skies
And the Greatness of God
Who Remembers all who remember Him

Like the moon of Shawwal
Spinning slowly in the night
Surrendered and reflecting light
Over the city of Jeddah

My Optimism About Beruriah

Corey Habbas

I.

Girls fight for dominance.
We eat grass, slide through mud.

My flesh flubbers
like Rashed Judeh
pummeled during a knockout
inside the prison wall.
Lablab, lablab.
As she hurls another punch
a labret opens up.

We shake it off.
She goes home.

The flummox dangles
around my neck.
It opens a memory,
in my Arab ghetto,
but it doesn't unlock a door.

II.

Friday night, Women
in Black stand on street corners.

The rules say, don't play
Nasheeds, but sometimes I do.
Labdanum, labdanum.

Friday night, she watches
from a distance and
skirts their shadows.

We watch each other hoping.

We push through the sidewalk,
past a broken necklace. Our red
knuckles bloom open.

III.

We rush to the fountain.
Our flowering is a lagan. We both drink
the same turbid water.

We wilt against a wall. Men
come out at night. Street lamps
illuminate her fear. We know

we both agree on
that we hate it
when boys watch.

They always try to break it up.
Then they start fighting about it.

We dip into dark circles
cast along the lachrymal road, and
I'll go home with her, humming
through this moral labyrinth.

Winner of 2006 Andalusia Prize

Ramadan Plans

Pamela K. Taylor

This Ramadan I will snuggle
On the couch with my daughter
Reading Qur'an
And also Green Eggs and Ham,
Mike Mulligan, Ferdinand, and Caps for Sale.
I will sit beside her at the kitchen table
Drawing glue stars
Sprinkling them with glitter
Spelling out the letters of Eid Mubarak
So she can print it on her own.
I will hold her hand as we take the short cut
To the post corner post office
Through the forest to Porter Street,
Down Porter to Washington
Pausing to turn over logs
And find pill bugs rolling into tight balls
Taking time to watch the chipmunks
Stuff their cheeks with autumn's bounty
Listen to the wind
Make chimes of crisping leaves
Remember the glory of God's Mercy.

This Ramadan I will break fast
On cookies still hot from the oven
And the warmth of a child's joy
Her delight in sitting on the counter
Cracking eggs
Stirring in brown sugar
Sneaking a chocolate chip
With tendrils of sweet, sticky dough still clinging
Wearing an apron that matches mamma's
I'll eat cold pizza for suhur
Or cold cereal
While my husband feasts
On leftover rice and keema
Grilled salmon and spicy corn
I'll perfect my huraira
Discover the recipe for fatoush
Share biryani and chocolates with my book group gals

And, like a witch or vampire,
I'll only raid the Halloween haul after dark.

This Ramadan I'll practice my self-control
I won't yell when my kids miss the bus
Or forget to take their muddy shoes off
Before climbing the carpeted stairs
I won't scold when the littlest spills her milk
For the third time
Because it really *was* an accident
Even after two reminders
I won't lecture when the twins
Play computer games
Before finishing their homework
Especially if it's just one page
That will only take fifteen minutes to finish
I won't roll my eyes when my oldest
Uses the hood of her sweatshirt for a scarf
During Asr or Maghrib
Covered is covered, *khalas*
I'll curve my lips
When I feel like scowling
At a left behind sock
Or unconsidered comment from my husband.

This Ramadan
I will not deny *any* of my Lord's blessings.

Roman's Camera

Nermeen Mouftah

At seventeen, I got my first job working for Roman's Camera. Mr. Roman was formerly a floor manager at Herbie's, but stepped away from his job to pursue a life long dream of owning his own camera shop. At my interview, Mr. Roman said he was looking for an employee he could count on to treasure his family business. He said he was looking for a partner to share, respect, and care for his store. He said he wanted a friend who could extend the "Roman community feeling." I never actually heard the motto, but Mr. Roman referred to it often, not only to me, but also in front of customers. It was my elusive ideal for customer service and his pride, his very own invention of retail morality.

We got along well from the beginning. When customers were in his presence, he would call himself bread and refer to me as butter. He was happy to have a conscientious employee who worked well with customers so he could escape back to the lab. I quickly learned that as much as Mr. Roman loved his store, he didn't like his customers. I was happy to have the store to myself, to polish the merchandise and persuade the shoppers. I thought of the two of us as the sun and the moon, both critical members of an all important relationship, never meeting, but slipping by one another all the time. Of course, he was the moon and I was the sun. (I would have to be the sun. Without me to light up the store, who could have kept the wallets in the shop?)

My job was to greet customers as they walked in the door and help them find picture frames and photo albums. I was supposed to be helpful, quick, and friendly. Whenever I heard the bell on the door jingle with a customer's entrance, I would bustle about dusting frames. I would pick one in particular, shine the glass and then turn to the customer with my prim smile and glossed lips to say: "This is one of my favourites. Honey wood is a timeless classic. Goes well with just about any photo." At which point, the customer would look at the frame, my forefinger neatly covering any sign of cost and respond: "Well, that is a classic."

I worked hard at Roman's. The polite chatter I practiced was a long-buried tradition of the 1950's, which is exactly what Mr. Roman wanted. Roman's Camera was to be a photo shop for the cutting edge photographers, but a memory box for the retired clientele aching to spend their pensions. Mr. Roman located his store strategically near an adult lifestyles community, Shallowbrook, where my grandparents, with whom I lived, had retired. Mr. Roman himself lived across town on the top floor of a waterfront high-rise. His neighbours owned the Downtown Workout and Fitness Centre.

Roman's Camera stood in a small strip mall with a Toronto Dominion bank, Petterific, Godly Lochs Hair and Nail, and a Mac's Milk convenience store. Virtually all of the customers were sixty-plus dog owners, which placed me in the lovely position of being not only a Roman's employee, but also dog-sitter extraordinaire. Of course, Mr. Roman would not allow pets in the store unless he thought he could make a hefty sale, in which case he would venture out of his photo lab and tinker with the cameras, while I sat keeping one eye on the door and the other on the poodle. Mr. Roman bought out an old Minutes Photo, a failing chain that decorated the store in holiday green and red year round. Mr. Roman preserved the lab, but remodelled the entire store to look like an old family shop, where customers could trust their photos were in the good hands of people who knew what memories were all about.

So Mr. Roman ripped out the stained tile and replaced it with a hard wood that "belonged in Grandma's kitchen," according to Mr. Roman himself. He took out the fluorescent lighting and used floor lamps that looked as though they had been collected from different parts of the world, when in actuality, they had been acquired at a bulk price from the local Bombay Company faux antique outlet. I likened the shop to a jewellery box: a wooden treasurer that when opened, twinkled and shone, sparkling with seduction.

The frames did not have the usual cardboard generic prints, but instead boasted family photographs. When Mr. Roman first began the business, the photos were all of his family. His wife, Betsy, in the speed boat, his daughters, Emily and Erica, as babies, skiing in their

brightly coloured snow suits, which would garner an "oh my, look at those colours!" from customers. The Roman children would sweetly smile out at their audience, better than any paid models, pleading with customers to purchase their father's merchandise. However, after the customers had grown used to the Roman family photo essay, even the elderly patrons needed change. When Mr. Roman realised his customers were growing restless, he asked me to bring in some photos of my family. The idea made me nervous, but I searched the house for something appropriate. I had a few poses as a baby that my grandparents had framed. I used those hoping that customers wouldn't make the distinction between my baby pictures and the pictures of Emily and Erica. But when more frames needed to be filled, I went searching for pictures of my grandparents posing together. I chose a set of pictures that were taken of them on their fortieth wedding anniversary. They sat in front of cake with lit candles. In some photos they are smiling at the camera; in other photos, at each other. I had taken these pictures myself.

Once elderly customers saw photographs resembling their own, they started to bring in their photographs. Betsy and the girls, the speedboat and the cottage retired from the shelves and were replaced by the afternoon activities of the Shallowbrook community. Mr. Roman accepted the photos and a new era of Roman's Camera began. We were flooded with so many photographs, that we needed to rotate pictures through the frames to give each print a viewing. Customers came to see their photos on display until Roman's Camera became the unofficial Shallowbrook Village Photo Gallery.

Mr. Roman was thrilled. Once customers saw their precious photos of Lucky or Schnook in a mahogany frame, they would fall in love and purchase it, often in duplicate. Sales were up and the "Roman community feeling" had never been better. Mr. Roman even began photo competitions. He had four categories: vacations, pets, family and Canada. The pet category was the most competitive, and when the first winners, Mrs. Oozendorf and her half husky-half shepherd, were announced, Mr. Roman lost a few customers who claimed that he favoured certain breeds. Mrs. Henchley was particularly adamant that Mr. Roman had a prejudice against white-

haired, shiatsu dogs and tried to wage a protest against the shop. Mr. Roman saw the poster campaign on the front door of the store, a sign that read: Roman Fascism sends Shiatsu Puppies to Gas Chamber. He pretended to be pleased that he would no longer have to deal with Mrs. Henschley's Othello stories, said "Good riddance," and ripped down the poster. But I knew that he was going to miss Mrs. Henschley's five-film-a-month habit of puppy photography, so three days into the protest, I invited Mrs. Henschley to my grandparents' house for tea to discuss her smear campaign. I tried to convince her that her Othello was by far the most attractive dog in the competition and that Mrs. Oozendorf had won on account of the portrait style technique used in the photo.

"Come now. Do you think I'm daft, missy? Mrs. Oozendorf won because of her beast's mane. Nothing to do with photography. Technique, my left foot. People think half breeds are something special and Mr. Roman is no different. But he shouldn't be parading around, pretending to have a photo competition when he is just conducting a dog show. You know, I knew he never liked my Othello. He's always complimenting the other customers on their pictures of their dogs, but he says nothing to me or Othello." Mrs. Henschley was indignant, but after two more cups of tea and a serving of lemon pound cake I conceded that perhaps the dogs did play a role in the competition and that the Oozendorf dog had an underbite that gave him a distinctive air. I explained that disfigurement, while unattractive to pet owners, does give a photograph character. This pleased Mrs. Henschley very much and she agreed to return to Roman's Camera. Mr. Roman never did understand how I persuaded Mrs. Henschley to return.

When Mrs. Henschley returned with her film for development, she didn't make any efforts to draft a peace agreement with Mr. Roman, despite his efforts to treat her with the usual sugary customer service.

"I haven't returned because I have changed my opinion of you, sir. Fact of the matter is you're the only photo developer in walking distance. And as we know, Othello needs his walks. Plus, I like your assistant here." At which point, she opened a tin of Altoids she had

extracted from her purse, and offered one to me with a pat on my cheek.

"Well, we are pleased to see you here again." Mr Roman responded, plastering on the "Roman community feeling" smile. Behind Othello, I heard him mumble, "Batty. Positively loopy," accompanied by a few curse words and lists of destinations for Mrs. Henchely and her shiatsu to visit.

Following the boycott, Roman's Camera was faced with a new challenge. This one was Mr. Roman himself. He began to disappear from the store for extended periods of time. He would leave me to watch over the shop, while I watched him cross the strip mall to Godly Lochs. When I hinted to Mr. Roman that customers were missing his presence in the store, the receptionist from the salon, Patricia, began visiting Mr. Roman at the shop. Her peroxide hair and burgundy nail enamel stood out in the shop of antique woods and friendly "Good days". Patricia became a store fixture, like the epilepsy mint chocolates that nobody purchased. When she was in the store, she and Mr. Roman would sit in the photo lab by themselves, while I worked, polishing wood and discussing the wonders of the new glossy print format with customers.

I developed distaste for Patricia early on in her dealings with Mr. Roman. She would sway into the shop with a roll of film for "The most immediate development. Really, I really need it as soon as possible." Then she would skip to the back to watch Mr. Roman to develop the film. But the two would get distracted by each other, so I was forced to sort her photos, package them, and price them, always very careful not to give her any discount that Mr. Roman certainly would have offered. I would catch glimpses of Patricia in darkened photographs wearing thin blouses surrounded by girls that wore a similar shade of lipstick and cut of bangs. There were photos of Patricia as a red head, Patricia flirting with a tree, Patricia and a cat lying on their stomachs looking coy and destructive. Mr. Roman even added this picture to a silver frame in the store. He said we needed variety in the shop. I thought that we had more than enough.

In the days of Patricia's visits and his own escapes to the salon, Mr. Roman was a different man. He was less judgemental of my cardigans, less cynical of customers, and criticized the photographs in the lab less frequently. He had an air of nonchalance that made his behaviour all the more aggravating. So while Mr. Roman was absorbed with Patricia's freshly permed hair and orange pumps, I slowly began making my own changes around the store. The 'Roman community feeling' was being redesigned by an underling. At first, my additions were small. I began slipping red-eye correction pens into the shopping bags of our frequent customers as an appreciation gift. I even asked Mr. Roman if we could set up a bargain table in the corner of the shop. I tried to convince him that the bargains would draw customers further into the shop, increasing our chances of making a sale. But Mr. Roman didn't need convincing; he gave all of my projects the stamp of approval with an unheeding, "Why not?". I started to play Barbara Streisand and the Beach Boys in the shop, too.

All my work paid off. I had sufficiently distracted customers with freebies, bargains, and music to keep them from noticing Patricia's laughter wafting through the store, or from noticing Mr. Roman's frequent absence. Even Betsy was so preoccupied with the shop that she didn't seem to notice Mr. Roman's preoccupation. When she would stop by the store to drop off a "Roman hand-packed lunch", she always seemed too caught up in the bargain table to notice Patricia leaning over the counter, intently watching Mr. Roman put on his lab coat. And I found myself too absorbed in polishing and repolishing to notice Mr. Roman's comings and goings.

In fact, I had become so good at losing track of Mr. Roman that I didn't notice Mrs. Edgeworth from the bank enter the store one day and pull him aside for a discussion. I had become so good at losing track of Mr. Roman that I didn't notice Mrs. Edgeworth leave the store until I heard a loud crash and rushed over to the front of the store to see that Mr. Roman had fallen, taking down all of the prize-winning, framed photographs with him.

"Mr. Roman, Mr. Roman, are you all right?" I picked off the shards of glass that covered him, making sure not to damage any of the prints. I tried to help him to his feet, but he wouldn't move. He lay on the floor facing the ceiling fans going round and round and round.

"Mr. Roman? Mr. Roman?"

But I could tell his concentration was elsewhere. The hardwood floor was on his back, his vision was spinning with the smell of lemon Pledge on his nostrils. I felt uncomfortable, like the time I accidentally walked in on him in the bathroom. I tried to help him up again, and again he would not cooperate.

"My legs," he complained, "oh, my legs. I can't feel them anymore." And he let his eyes glaze over. I remember the next two hours of my life like a movie sequence—I saw the objects and the characters in front of me, yet was able to detach emotion from the tragedy, the way only a spectator of a film can remain apart from the character, from the emotions. I tried to pick Mr. Roman up from his feet, but they flopped heavily to the ground of shattered wood and glass. I had the presence of mind to lock the door and flip the sign to "Sorry, we're closed." Then, like every action I had ever been taught by Mr. Roman, unlike any action I thought I would ever undertake in such a situation, I cleaned. Not only the mess created by Mr. Roman's fall, but I searched for new areas of the store to shine and polish, all the while stepping carefully around Mr. Roman's body. I polished camera lenses. The Pentax SZ7 had a particularly stubborn fingerprint.

Have you ever been immobilized by indecision? So torn, you were ashamed of yourself? Single prints or double prints? Matte or glossy? With borders or without? And you are so embarrassed, you choose not to choose. Do I call Betsy or Patricia?

But then you realize—this isn't for me to decide.

Just as I started to falter in my work, the sun's escaping and my refusal to turn on the lights, I heard him speak:

"I have some financial troubles." He was sitting up, propping his back against a cupboard and squinting at me through the dark.

"What?"

"Well, that's what she told me. She said—Mr. Roman, I am afraid to tell you, you have some very serious financial troubles."

I took the news lightly. I was so happy to hear that his problems were financial and not something else. I tried to comfort him as though his dog had run away on him, "Mr. Roman, that's fine. You'll get through it."

"Get through it? I have a family. A wife and two girls. I have a family to think about." His anger crystallized into desolation as he defended himself against a crime nobody accused him of, and he blubbered on, "I have some very serious financial troubles, very serious."

I saw Mr. Roman before me, head in his hands, whimpering. I knew that despite our bread and butter act, this was a man I did not know. I was acquainted with Mr. Roman, photographer; Mr. Roman, entrepreneur, Mr. Roman, servant of camera-happy pet lovers. But in front of me sat a dishevelled version of my boss, a man I had never seen. One with bad habits and secrets and much to fear. And I was overwhelmed with a feeling that I wanted nothing to do with him. Nothing at all. So I took my cardigan and walked home that night. When I left the store, I could still hear Mr. Roman's tears as he gasped for air to fill his lungs. I could hear him until I firmly shut the door behind me.

The next morning there was no Barbara Streisand or Beach Boys at Roman's Camera. There was no bargain table in the back corner. Mr. Roman said "Good morning" and the two of us carried on in the store as usual—a mutual understanding of what our roles should be.

Patricia stopped visiting the shop and Mr. Roman never came out of the lab. I saw less of Betsy, but Mr. Roman assured me that she was doing well, just at home taking care of the girls. I continued polishing, dog-sitting, and polishing, so when the shop was sold to

Mrs. Anderson, a British immigrant who "absolutely loved the quaint atmosphere," I took credit for the burnished wood and the gleaming glass.

"We're going to put all those minute shops out of business. All of their cheesy speedy photo." Mrs. Anderson chimed while she inspected our new stock of disposable cameras. She and I were like two peas in a pod. Business was good and I liked her blunt words, always saying what she wanted to say whenever she wanted to say it, customers be damned. She incorporated my ideas into the store. At last there was a portrait studio installed in the back room. The studio specialized in what I coined "petography".

I only saw Mr. Roman once after Roman's Camera became Anderson Photo. He came into the store to sign some papers over to Mrs. Anderson. I explained to him that I needed the money for school and he did not seem to be offended. I could tell he was pleased to see that the hardwood floors were intact and the ceiling fans spinning, not replaced by an air conditioning system. He told me he had returned to Herbie's, but that he was keeping up with his own photography. He had moved out of the penthouse to a bungalow, not far from Shallowbrook. When I saw him, he looked tired and I wanted to protect him. I wanted to scold and protect him. But I knew that was not a part of my job description.

Winner of 2002 Andalusia Prize

Rumsfeld's Return

Rebecca Masterton

Nobody knew what had happened to the plane. There was no evidence of it having been shot down. It had simply disappeared off the radar on its way back to Washington, with Donald Rumsfeld in it. The last place it had been detected was over Siwa, the western desert of Egypt. After that, it had vanished from the flight controllers' screens. Of course, today it was big news. Everybody was panicking, puzzled, not sure what to do. There were rumblings in Washington that perhaps Cairo should be carpet-bombed, as a way of persuading any potential militants to own up. The genocide of faceless, seemingly menacing brown people was always a satisfying, if short-term, panacea for the outrage that anyone should dare to touch the temporal rulers of the material realm.

However, there were also rumours that Rumsfeld had simply had enough; or rather, he had become bored. Even after more than three million Iraqi deaths (caused by sanctions, war, etc.) those damn Arabs were *still* being ungrateful for having been saved. When were they *ever* going to be beaten into submission and gratitude? But more importantly, when were the oil revenues going to start trickling into his bank accounts? The price of oil had gone up, not down. And then there was the tedium of having to churn out the religio-political ideology in order to placate restless voters. Was it all really worth it?

Rumsfeld's colleagues were interviewed. Had he shown any signs of depression before leaving for Iraq? Bush answered that he had in fact been a little annoyed for not managing to get his favourite suit back from the cleaners before setting off. Rice said that he had not been making his usual satirical jokes about Bush's illiteracy over morning coffee. Yes, he had seemed quieter than usual. Cheney had noticed that, during a round of golf, Rumsfeld's ball had got lost in the sandpit and he had failed to find it, even after twenty minutes of digging in the sand with his golf-club. Perhaps this was a portent from the Heavens about Rumsfeld's disappearance. It was difficult to tell exactly *what* he had been thinking, or *how* he had been feeling, before he set off for Iraq, but then it always was difficult to tell. Those

steely, close-set eyes lurking behind deceptively benign round spectacles gave away nothing personal whatsoever.

Blair appeared on television, hands pressed together as if in prayer, making a very good speech about how concerned he was about Rumsfeld's disappearance. He put all the weighty pauses in the right places, and now and again his voice cracked, effectively creating the impression of a person who had sincere feelings. Rumsfeld, he said, had always shown compassion for the Iraqi people and had done his best to ensure that the whole world was liberated. It was inconceivable that he would abandon his mission half-way. He was, after all, a man of principle. He would continue to the bitter end, no matter how many had to die.

Black Hawk helicopters were sent out to search the Siwa desert for signs of a plane crash. They found nothing. The Mediterranean was scanned using infra-red radar. Nothing was found, except the remains of one or two Greek ships, sunk off the coast of Carthage after Aeneas had abandoned Dido. This was the strange thing: if Rumsfeld had been kidnapped by those pesky Bedouins, there would surely remain the wreckage of the plane. They could not simply bury it under the sand. Anyway, infra-red radar showed no signs of any wreckage, and raiding Bedouin tents brought no joy either, particularly since Bedouins did not understand much English, even when it was shouted at them at top volume.

After the plane had failed to be found in Siwa, the whole of the Middle East came under suspicion and Bush made a speech about the how the dark clouds of Armageddon were gathering on the horizon; and how soon, if Rumsfeld was not handed over, the rivers of the Nile, the Euphrates and any other rivers in the area, would be running with blood.

"The people who have taken Rumsfeld hate freedom," said Bush. "But we'll get them, no matter what it takes. We will leave no grain of sand unturned in our search for Rumsfeld."

Speculation spread to the possibility that Rumsfeld might never have boarded the plane in the first place and that the plane had done

a U-turn and gone back to Iraq, because it had taken off without him; but some soldiers said that they definitely saw him board, and they definitely saw that plane take off, and it was definitely in the direction of America. Prayers and vigils were held for Rumsfeld's return. Bishops and priests made speeches. Bush said he would continue with his mission, even without Rumsfeld and he was sure that Rumsfeld would be proud of him. He spoke with tears in his eyes and his voice cracked, effectively creating the impression of a person who had sincere feelings.

Washington wanted to bomb Cairo, Damascus, Tehran and any other city in the area, in order to put pressure on the Egyptian, Syrian and Iranian governments to hand Rumsfeld over. France objected, saying that diplomatic pressure must be exerted first, and that anyway, perhaps members of the US government should just accept that Rumsfeld was not going to come back, and get on with their lives. At least that was one global-irritant off the list. The newspapers were filled with vitriol, both for Rumsfeld and those barbaric fanatics who must have carried him off. Stock markets see-sawed, soaring one minute and plunging the next. People in Texas felt insecure and looked to Bush to do something, and Bush said, "I will do something." In many other parts of the world, however, a mood of tranquillity could be felt in the streets. People began to smile again. Others said that, perhaps there was hope, after all.

Seven days passed and there was still no sign of him, but we knew where he was. We had invited him, quietly, to a place which does not exist on earth, because those of our spiritual lineage were concerned, and because this is the way that we work. Do not think that our leaders do not act, even though they left this realm fourteen hundred years ago. They did not die for nothing.

Somebody spotted Donald Rumsfeld at a stall in an outdoor market, in Dakar, Senegal. We had given him some money, but by the time he was seen, he had spent it all, since he had taken a liking to jollof rice and plantain, and enjoyed sitting on the steps of the local mosque in the evenings, sharing a plateful with the imam and a few of the Tijani brothers. A reporter for The *Washington Post*, who was in

town to research Senegal's new *zakat* law, saw a tall, white man with mousy brown hair, round glasses and a fairly long beard. He was wearing a long white *jubba* and wide trousers. As the reporter passed this man, he heard his voice, and instantly recognised the slightly high-pitched twang, as Rumsfeld begged the market woman to spare him a few plantains.

The reporter instantly punched in the number for the *Washington Post* office on his satellite mobile, and, in the middle of the crowded market, exactly two feet away from Rumsfeld, shouted,

"Guess what! I've found Rumsfeld! No, no! I'm serious! I don't know how he got here. Yeah, he seems OK. Er...he's just negotiating a plantain deal at the moment...I-"

Rumsfeld turned, a flood of emotion filling his heart, for it seemed like years since he had heard an American voice.

*

Kennedy Airport was packed to bursting with reporters and photographers. Rumsfeld had been found and he was going to touchdown on the tarmac any second. The air was hot with speculation. Had he been tortured, beaten and starved? Had he managed to escape his captors? Or had he, after all, just gone on holiday for a while?

The plane touched down and drew to a halt. Immediately it was lit up with spotlights. A set of steps was brought to the plane door. The crowd murmured in anticipation. The plane door opened, and there, blinking in the spotlights, was a man they did not recognise. At first they cheered, but the cheers quickly died out and a hubbub of confusion rose into the warm night air.

"Hey! He looks like one of those Musslums!"

"Look at what they've done to him! My God! I wonder if he's OK?"

Rumsfeld grinned awkwardly and staggered down the steps, bodyguards fighting off the crowd. Reporters launched themselves in his direction, forcing their microphones towards him. He took a few

steps, then stopped. The reporters sensed that he was going to speak. Pictures of Rumsfeld with a beard and dressed in white were flashed around the world, and then, unbelievably, he said,

“Ash-hadu an-la ilaha illallahu, wa ash-hadu anna Muhammad Rasulullah.”

The crowd thought he must have gone mad. They uttered exclamations of dismay, but there just so happened to be Muslim reporter in the crowd, and he shouted out, above the noise,

“Mr Rumsfeld, have you really become Muslim?”

“Guys,” said Rumsfeld. “I cannot explain to you what I have seen and what I have been through. I have met representatives of the Prophet Muhammad himself, peace and blessings be upon him and his family. I have also been privileged to meet the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him and his family. One of his representatives took out my heart and showed it to me. It was like a little lump of granite. Then he blew on it and recited some verses from the Qur’an, and I saw my heart turn into a lump of flesh, and that lump of flesh had a light inside it. They put my heart back into my chest. They introduced me to some of the Prophet’s faithful companions, may God have mercy on them, and also to his family. This is a family of knowledge, people. You would not believe how I have cried.”

“Mr Rumsfeld! Mr Rumsfeld!” everybody shouted at once. “Mr Rumsfeld, what are you going to do now, Mr Rumsfeld? This is political suicide! You must be crazy!”

“People,” said Rumsfeld, “I was crazy and now I am sane, or let’s say, saner. Once you taste the sacred you can’t forget it. And once you see the history in things, and the meaning in things, you can’t carry on unless you are just plain stupid, and I have always liked to think of myself as an intelligent man.”

“But Mr Rumsfeld! What are you going to do now?”

“It goes without saying that I am resigning from the US government, as that kind of power makes me feel sick. My guts can’t

tolerate it. And I'm going to do my best to become ever more conscious of the Divine. And I'm going to do my best to campaign against the oppression inflicted on the world by our country, the United States and by other countries such as Britain and Russia. I'm not just campaigning for Muslims; I'm campaigning for the folks of South America whose economies have been sent down the plughole by our policies; I'm campaigning for the Palestinians, Christian and Muslim; I'm giving away all the cash I've acquired through arms deals with Saddam Hussein and Africa and Indonesia and places like that; I'm campaigning for greater justice for the American people: those who have been prevented from voting because of our manipulations of the law; I'm campaigning for the better treatment of prisoners around the world, including ours, who are routinely tortured using methods you've seen in Abu Graib; I'm campaigning against the US government's funding of terrorists, such as the Mujahedeen, who have killed and blown up thousands of ordinary Muslims in Iran; I'm campaigning against the rigging of elections in Iraq and Afghanistan; I'm campaigning for reparations to be made to the Somali people who were tortured and beaten by UN soldiers during that dirty war; I'm campaigning for blood money to be paid to the families of the three million babies who have died as a result of UN sanctions; I'm campaigning for the Burmese people whose family members have been raped and murdered on a US oil pipeline project; I'm campaigning for an end of tacit US support for temporal regimes around the world that leave the people to sink into filth and poverty."

"But Mr Rumsfeld, aren't you afraid you might be assassinated by the CIA now?"

Before Rumsfeld could answer, a large white van with blacked-out windows pulled up behind him, and some men in long white coats leaped out on to the runway. Rushing towards him and taking him by the arms, they bundled him back in to the van. He was never seen again.

A Sea Fowl

Adnan Ashraf

A spreading vapor, in the chest, and I
say, I am a new man. I am a new man.
I am a new man.

Farid knew it was true, knew he was
new;

could feel the density of his
newness like a compressed transistor
broadcasting the news from his heart: I
am a new man. I am a new man.

could feel it like a memory, renewed, a
forgotten river reclaimed. He moved.

could see the tubes, interwoven spaghetti
strings, of transparent green
glass, and the breeze that traveled
through, his sustained revival.

He lifted his feet from the hammock,
and dropped them onto the sandy ceramic floor. He moved.
Towards
the door. Into
the sunlight, out to the shore. Behooved by the tide.
He knew nothing more.

He opened his heart for the sun to
release its rays through, driving
her
power into the sand below. He lifted a
heel and brought it down into wet
grain and the second, again, and peeled
back his lips, and let forth the sound of newness,
a spangling vibration filtering through his hip
and his brain and back again, a hula hoop
of sound with which he spun,
channeling the rays of the sun; out to the
mountains of the furthest clime,
did this novelty reach, way beyond the
beach, and descend, into the cool deep

of a skyward-gazing cave, to recline, as
he spun round in the sand, and did
untwine, note after note until the shore was
renewed, each grain of sand:
white, each wave a blue reborn; and
the sea fowl's feet, when his
shoulders were adorned with them,
bloomed with the blood of his heart -
a red like the red of his heart, the internal
factory of flesh and blood - and
its feathery wings, as they lifted him,
blazed like star-shine, and its eyes
glistened like dew, watering the
pigmentation of newness.

shards of mirror

Saleem Safdar

in the raging sea of identity
tossed amidst waves, lost
without sight or sound
as the whispers rush in i drown
longing yet for familiar ground
the reasoning begins to choke
as uttered by the starlit sky above
are the truest words Labid ever spoke
echoing the name of the One I love
as i descend towards the depths
led by the brute to blackness below
in the breath before spiritual death
i profess my confession by blood as it flows
within and without, as sea reflects sky
testifying truth even as i lie
daily i die a thousand deaths profane
and with every wrenching beat
my heart repeats your name

Surrender

Asmaa Hussein

Everything here is failing,
mirrored in the trees...
take this beauty, ravaged by an unspeakable pain.

edges of my soul wither and brown, dry.
turn in upon themselves.

A tree loosens its grip on its leaves. Cruel.
allows them to die so that it can live.

I am dying.

Stripped, nothing left but her, the essence;
bare and unprotected. Shivering.
Free, for all to see.

Winter sets in without hope for spring.

Winner of 2005 Andalusia Prize

This Thing Called Palestine

Naseem Tarawnah

This woman I see
like my mother, like my sister
her hands are manifestations of recent tragedies
she grasps ink dry pens to record poetry
she breathes words into her dying lungs
this mother who is beautiful
this wife that is tragic
has a wing span that can stretch across an ocean
or at least wrap itself around her children,
who write unfinished haikus on tall block walls
words like '*this proliferate gray is killing me*'
or '*why must you take so much away from me?*'
and barely audible whispers seep
in to sun dried pupils
battered from tears of lifetimes
that could forge river deep remorse
drenched in scattered lifelines
while the heart and mind entwine
this thing called Palestine

that olive oil, soothing the blood stained soil
of roots uprooted in diaspora
branches broken like limbs, they resist with a quiet dignity
but these fathers and brothers are not this tree
they are the trappings of a cactus
that refuses to die
withstanding the might of goliath machines
it plants itself with every zephyr
every doldrum wind carries a seed
constructing new stages for its hazy flowers to dance
a beautiful display of a yet to be dreamt up color line
this thing called Palestine

But this woman, this beautiful creature
hears oceans laughing
and mountains posing for still life art
this still life town of voiceless minarets
who call in the night for an unrequited greatness
in a cry that rings of sweet lament
here, poets could write masterpiece elegies

depicting an orchestra of struggling echoes
This mother, this wife, scribbles encrypted diaries
left for a frail world to decipher
a long list of porcelain dreams she's had
described as something so divine
this thing called Palestine

Though this wall from the yard
this cemetery playground
this chiseled segregation
this sweet coated flirtation
burns flag shaped tattooed scars
the stripes and stars
contrast the green and red
the black and white
for this woman I see
like my mother, like my sister
she is a footnote in an unwritten history
I alone wonder what sorrow these hazel eyes disguise
and her children are monarch butterflies
foreign to this land
she kneels on her broken hands
her broken knees
to form a pedestal on her broken spine
for her children to seize
this thing called Palestine

Winner of 2005 Andalusia Prize

To Have Sleep

Asmaa Hussein

Snow is falling silently outside
covering all, sparing none.
The soft blanket encrusts vehicles and bare heads.
Snow makes everything quieter, makes everyone
Creep along slowly on the streets, looking down so as not to
slip and fall.

But in here it's so warm. Oh to have sleep at this very moment
would be wonderful. But I have to trudge along home. Alone in the
snow

Just like all the other sorry human beings out there.

Snow sounds so like death. Eventually catching all,
Sparing none.
Death silences much, surrounds us
From every side before closing in
And everyone must walk the path
on their own to eventually reach home
to find sleep. Beautiful sleep

My eyes feel so heavy.

Travellers on the Way

Roger Abdul Wahhab Boase

in memory of Michael Scott, 1917-1992

There were four passengers with me that day:
the late Michael Scott, known as Sidi Abdullah,
an American from Mecca named Harun,
Azzedine, a young student of Fez,
and a blind fakir of Meknes,
who, as a devotee of Shaykh ibn al-Habib,
was aware of his successor on the Sufi Way.

We travelled south-east in my brand-new car
towards a place full of palms called Turuq,
with Venus before us, the bright evening star.
But leaving the black carpet of tarmac,
the sky turning red and dusk descending,
the desert track beyond the gully we had crossed
would have led us in circles forever,
had our guide not spoken to show us the way.

"We are lost because the time of maghrib has passed;
we have failed to kneel down and pray."
Having found a place free from thistles and stones,
the fakir sensed at once the direction of Ka'bah
and pointed his finger to the invisible east.
Soon afterwards we reached the mud walls of Turuq,
and with a paraffin lamp, a full white moon
and a million stars to light our way,
we were taken as guests to the upper room.

We awoke to the sight of a green oasis
and the sound of "La illaha ill'Allah"
rising from the glassless windows below,
where each disciple of the venerable Shaykh,
in turbans of white and biblical attire,
waved a long palm to keep off the flies,
remembering only the name of God:
"There is no god but only Allah;
if you run towards Him, He will rush towards you;
we are all travellers on the Way."

Tribute to the Last Aisle

Ibrahim N. Abusharif

Thanks for coming. I'll be as brief as possible.

As most of you can imagine, throughout the campaign I received many orders from my commanders, and I did my best to carry them out. They all seemed straight forward, with the dangers and risks normally associated with war and slaying. The orders came from the generals in charge, some of whom are sitting here in the front row, alongside other patricians of our society.

But since we gather here today for reflection and candor, I feel it necessary to speak about the trials that escaped public notice and that threatened our very way of life. You see, the battle had turned against us, confounding all predictions. Even our generals were startled, and they ran off to manage the war from a distance. Defeat hovered over our heads; we all saw and pointed. The men were exhausted beyond compare; they lost the will to fight, some the will to live. Scores were injured, with their wounds poorly dressed with pathetic sale fliers taped to their gashed skins. The battle had dragged on way past the promises we had heard paged overhead. Many perished. Rules were broken. And no one really remembered why we were warring in the first place.

We were pinned down, many of us pressed against the wall feeling the cold of the winter outside. I was hunkered behind some boxes near the end caps, trying to spy, when I was handed a crumpled up piece of paper with the final order. It nearly suffocated me. I actually felt my throat constrict and face flush. The time had come to either surrender dignity or surrender life. Victory was not part of the discourse, unless you were absolutely insane. I don't say this lightly. We had crazies among us who swore they would soon stroll by the dairy case, as the young lovers used to do during times of peace. The more desperate things became the more they spoke about it. And some actually tried the stroll, but they never made it back. Their parents are with us here today, and I'm very sorry for your loss.

The order given to me was specific: announce only that we lost the war. Strangely, there was no mention of our gilded cause, which had become as valued as an expired coupon—some halo of vague phrases that once inspired us to aim our base instincts at the *other*. Sentience, souls, mothers: our enemies had none of these. We were assured of this, and we weren't allowed to study the matter. They were authors of disorder, workers of corruption, makers of idols, and shoplifters—language that softens the art of harming.

So I stood up and thought of the selection of words available to me, words seaworthy enough to cross the straits between the obvious and the spoken. At the same time I needed to look out for the next barrage from aisle nineteen, just in case the enemies decided to attack again. With nothing to say, still I opened my mouth, which always helped me before. But this time, something very peculiar happened. The ether streams ran out, ladies and gentlemen, and the fictive dream broke. A revolution fomented inside of me, as half-dead warriors turned their wizened faces toward me, waiting for their leader to say something about the next maneuver in our battle, as if the mirthless assumptions we devoted ourselves to were still in effect. How does one speak when invisible firmaments are collapsing all around him, when the paradigms and structures that once made our deeds seem so righteous implode? I needed to be swift, to steel myself before I myself ran off like a madman to the dairy case. So I recalled a friend who fell dead at my feet the day the sale signs went up. His eyes wouldn't remain shut, no matter how many times I pressed down on them. He kept looking up at me, as if he had something to say after passing through some barrier, after his matriculation in the college of death. I turned the body away from me, and when I stood up, everything had become a matter of revenge, the reason for my birth and why I stepped on the ribbed mat that opened the doors like magic. The revolt inside of me was quashed, but only for a while.

Here was the situation: the enemies had just overrun the utensil aisle. They were well armed, while our arsenal was down to 48-ounce cans of puree. The condiment bottles were spent, with the sorties of glass having no apparent effect. It was a set back, of

course, but minor compared to the calamity in the detergent aisle, two days before, when the battle started to turn against us. By our own hands, all the bleach had been spilt for the purpose of choking to death the devils of aisle four. Instead, we heard the howls of our own saintly men who foolishly thought they had the ultimate weapon that nothing could repel. Not a whiff was left, and somehow they still kept coming. Shocked, we resorted to the shame of retreat to another aisle, leaving our choking men and our dead on the tile. We finally ended up here, aisle 20, the last one, with hardly a weapon available to us. That's why the puree was so important. The cans, if thrown right, can strike the temple and kill a man. But the trajectory had to be perfect. That's how desperate we were. We were down to perfection and temples.

Just as I was about speak, a flurry of utensils flew over head. We rushed to take cover in the bottom shelves. Benign plastic forks and spoons clacked foolishly against the floor. Our enemies were either luring us into complacency or we were dealing with madmen who wanted more than victory, but also the trophy of our humiliation. And given the way things were going, we were willing to offer that, prepared to line the walls of their studies with our heads.

Things had calmed down in a few minutes. But I saw that Cubby got one in the gut, a butcher's knife. One metal weapon between the plastic! Pure evil! It was Cubby's chore to gather anything that had been thrown our way. We made the decision to ignore the rules of war convened at Customer Service: "Once a weapon is used, it cannot be deployed against the enemy." But ever since the miscreants used fans from the appliance aisle to turn the bleach clouds against our boys, rules lost all meaning, and we decided to gather up the used weapons and redeploy them at will. We knew God would forgive us. Cubby was the first to volunteer. Bless him! He stood so tall, so immersed, so damn raw, and so sure. He proclaimed, "By God, I will be the Gatherer!"

But now, blood shot out from Cubby's fresh wound. I took off my apron and jammed the cloth in the gash. Cubby's writhing grimace nearly drove me to tears. So I looked away for relief, only to see

something else, a boon, a way out, a mistake on the part of an exulting enemy: a can opener. Some moron tossed over the tall shelf what not only helped us survive and saved me from my speech, but also snatched a stalemate from the jaws of certain defeat...

[Applause]

Please hold your ovation. I'm not finished yet.

[Applause]

Please...seriously.

Thank you.

Right then and there, a plan came to me. I can't say what the details are because I've been told, with a suggestion of threat, we'll want to sell the plans to mom and pop stores, and then sell the strategies against them. This way the wars keep coming, and you can't fight a war without buying something from someone. Sorry, but it's a reality I have embraced. Like you, I agreed to live this way, maybe against my will, if any of that is left. There wasn't a vote, but sometimes nothing is more effective than doing nothing, the main obligation of our citizenry.

I don't think bravery has survived, to be candid. That's why I sometimes think we're living in the last days, as I once heard it said. Whenever I think about the kind of men I know and the kind of boys and girls now pursuing leadership, bloated with self-importance, purveyors of frivolity disguised as seriousness, I can only look up at the ceiling and expect a big door to open and watch angels stream down to move the shelves as if they were cotton balls and turn the whole damn place around so that the sun rises from the west and sets in the east (if we have a full day to live).

The only thing I dare say—the extent of my dereliction—is that we didn't need perfection after all, just a trick, a lie, a prank that kills. Then we laid still. And we waited, not making a sound. Not a single whisper. And when they came, they reckoned us as dead. But they reckoned wrong. We swiftly “rendered them immobile” and “subjected them to permanent prone” and completed “Operation

Utter Subjugation," all the stupid phrases that helped us do what we did, words with which to celebrate our violence and validate our brutality. When the enemies of the other aisles saw the extent of our pyrrhic vengeance, they were only too pleased to accept a deadlock. Neither of us could have gone any further, to take the logic to a higher conclusion, anything near a reconstruction of possibilities. What else should I have expected?

I looked closely at the leader and his rag men, the survivors who surrendered. I ordered my men to take them away, to be redeemed later when the details of the brokered deal are settled. Then I turned my head in the other direction in a fashionably hurried manner. It looked like a move of indignation on my part, and my men interpreted it that way, as they grew more aggressive in handling the captives and organizing the corpses. They cursed and slapped them around, the living and the "immobile" both. But I turned my eyes only because I couldn't stand to notice that the enemy commander looked familiar, my neighbor, in fact, and his men like my men, with sentience and mothers after all.

My friends, it must be written somewhere that one of the signs of the end is when a person is unable to change. And it's only logical to assume that when a lot of people of this kind gather in one location and agree on sloth and the culture of *default* for their governance, then expect the imminent. There's no omniscient narrator in this story, and these are not salvos to admire. Give them no quarter in your mind. If you do, they'll quickly turn rancid and make you ill, but that's all. In no time, you'll go on with your lives, lovers, and entertainers. But I do want to say something before I go, before we lower Cubby into the floor and down into the earth, and offer kind words for our "Gatherer": I now know why the prophets of old begged their Lord for protection against profitless knowledge. It's not the kind of knowledge that forced their hands toward the heavens, but the mores that produce people uncaring of it, when ignorance holds together the quilt that keeps us warm at night and makes us feel everything's counterfeit and disconnected again, exactly the way we like it.

So long, Cubby.

Winner of 2004 Andalusia Prize

Village of Stones

Sara Umm Zaid

The intrepid journalist, as she called herself in her head, stood waiting on the steps, having rung the doorbell a minute earlier. She heard footsteps approaching the door, and took a deep breath before plastering a smile on her face.

The door opened, and there stood a middle aged, Arab woman looking like all other middle aged Arab women: slacks, a slightly too long blouse in a sober pattern, a white scarf on her head, her shoes sensible but stylish pumps.

"Ms. Hamdan?" the intrepid journalist thrust her hand out. "Hi, I'm Rima Daraghmeh, from *The Arab Journal*."

"Of course, you're right on time," smiled Ms. Hamdan. "Come, let's sit in my garden, it's a nice day today."

Rima followed Ms. Hamdan through a meticulously decorated home into the garden at the back. Immediately, the scent and sight of the garden took her back to her girlhood. There were flowers, a stone fountain, chairs arranged around small tables, fruit trees, and grape vines. It reminded her of the gardens kept in her small town back home, a piece of the country from which she and Ms. Hamdan both immigrated. Ms. Hamdan showed Rima to a table in the corner of the garden, where tea, seeds, and nuts had already been set out.

"Thank you," Rima murmured as she set her bag down. Ms. Hamdan sat and waited patiently as Rima rummaged through her bag to take out a notepad and tape recorder. "Shall we begin?" Ms. Hamdan nodded.

Rima set the tape player down on the table, and just as she pressed the record button, a feeling of electricity jolted through her and her stomach flip flopped. She'd waited years to see Hanan Hamdan with her own eyes, and ask her the questions that had been etched in her mind for years. She felt a little guilty for not being entirely truthful on the phone earlier in the week. She'd told Ms. Hamdan that she was doing a profile on successful Arab

businesswomen, but it wasn't the truth. She was here on a personal mission, this interview being the culmination of years of thoughts and questions.

"Ms. Hamdan, let's start at the beginning. As I was preparing for this story, I did some research on your software company, your community service, your University career, and so on. But I'd like to start a little earlier. In Kfar Hajar, where you were not Hanan Hamdan, but Hanan 'Awadi." Rima left the statement there in the air, and looked into Hanan's eyes. She was surprised to see that Hanan did not avert her gaze, but held it steadily. It was then that she realized that her visit was not entirely unexpected. Hanan had been waiting for this for years.

Hanan stared back at the eager young woman sitting across from her at the table, the short, curly black hair, and the angrily flashing eyes. Who was this Rima Daraghmeh? She searched her memory for the family name, but there had been none in Kfar Hajar.

"Who are you?" she asked calmly.

"I'm her niece, my mother was her sister." Ah, so that would explain the different last name. Hanan said nothing. The young woman leaned forward across the table. "Don't you want to know how I found you?"

Hanan shook her head. She'd read enough newspapers and seen enough movies to know that journalists employed every means available to them to track down people who didn't want to be tracked down.

Rima looked disappointed, and Hanan realized that she had come here thinking that she was holding a trump card, that she would find a bewildered and tearful woman. Youth. "What do you want, Rima Daraghmeh?"

"I want to know why. I want to know what happened. I want to know if what they said about her was true. You are the only one who knows the whole story." She leaned back in her chair. "I talked to him, you know." At this, Hanan did look startled. "He's pathetic," she

spit the words out. "He tried to act like he never knew her, even though I could see the guilt written all over him when I said her name. He lives very nicely in the capital, has a thriving business, lovely children, the whole nine yards. I want answers, I deserve answers. You've been hiding and prospering and living the good life for years. The least you owe me is some answers."

Hanan looked at her, and then looked away. She closed her eyes, and breathed in the scent of jasmine, memory of childhood. That was the problem with this new generation, always demanding answers, believing they deserved them, always cloaked in the armor of self-righteousness and the search for truth. How could this young woman know the truth, how could she understand how it used to be? She stared at her with those black, accusing eyes, but how could she know what Hanan had suffered the last thirty-five years? How could she be made to understand all that Hanan had given up? For this generation, it was nothing to turn your back on everything you'd known, to reinvent yourself, to sever ties.

But Hanan had come of age in a place where no one questioned the way things had always been, especially girls. It was as Hanan approached womanhood that this began to change in the Arab world, and Hanan had found herself caught up in the middle of it, quite unwillingly. In Hanan's time, no one would have dreamed of cutting all ties with their family, turning their backs on their country, and changing their father's name. Yet, Hanan had done all of this because she had been left with no choice.

She leaned forward towards Rima, her voice shaking with anger. "Do you know what it was for me to betray them all? My family, my village, my country, my heritage, my religion, my friend? Myself? To the people here, I've had the good life, I've 'made it.' But everyday, in my mind, I relive those days in Kfar Hajar. Do you think I've forgotten it? Do you think I've forgotten her? I have never forgiven myself, never. And everyday that I am 'Hanan Hamdan' is a reminder of the price I have had to pay for what I did and did not do." She sat back and closed her eyes again. Her heart was pounding. "I have waited for years to tell my story. I knew someone would come, I prayed that

someone would come. Although I committed injustice against her thirty-five years ago, I knew in my heart that one day, I would be given this chance to make reparations, however small.”

She opened her eyes and looked at the face of Rima Daraghmeh for a moment. “You are very much like her, did they tell you that?” Rima shook her head. “Well, you are. Not just in the face, but in the way that you are, all on fire for truth. It is my shame that I let her truth be buried in lies and dust thirty-five years ago. In our time we were raised to be silent, and it was my silence that killed her. Things are different here, and her truth can finally be heard.”

Hanan had known it was coming the moment she saw the girl standing in an alley between the houses, her fingers touching the fingers of the young man, her head resting under his shoulder. As she passed, she heard the girl whisper, “But how much longer?” Later, she saw her in the bakery, and her cheeks were flushed a light red, and her eyes were shining brightly. The girl thought she held a secret, but the truth was that, if Hanan had seen this, it was only a matter of time before her father, or brother noticed the flushed cheeks and shining eyes.

Months passed, and just as Hanan had figured, talk began. It started among the women, hissed from ear to ear, as tongues clucked and heads shook. “Have you heard,” said Umm Ayman, her eyes gleaming, the steam rising from her tea, “that they meet in secret...or what they think is secret?”

“May Allah protect our families from such shame,” responded Umm Saeed, and the other women murmured agreement.

Umm Hani, Hanan’s mother, asserted, “They should have married her years ago, when she started to blossom. She is beautiful, a good cook, and helps her mother diligently. They could have had any man in the county. Now, what family will have her for their son?”

Even though she knew the girl's fate was inevitable, Hanan struggled to put out the fuse that was lit that day in the alleyway. "Such talk," she said, "and yet none of you have seen such things with your own eyes. You know what this gossip will mean for her should it reach the ears of her family." The women lowered their eyes to the floor. She took a sip of the scalding hot tea and struggled to change the subject. "Now, Umm Ayman, you must tell us the secret behind these sweets you have prepared, because by my eye, I have never tasted such treats, except for those prepared by my dear mother."

After weeks of such incidents, Hanan knew she must confront the girl. She saw her one afternoon from her bedroom window, as she was going into the market, and quickly threw a scarf on over her head to go and meet her. She entered the market breathlessly, having run down three flights of stairs, and pretended to be engrossed in the canned goods at the end of the aisle where the girl was shopping. As she passed her by, Hanan whispered, "Meet me around the back of the market when you are done. It's important."

She bought a bottle of juice, and stood at the back of the market drinking it, pretending to watch the children playing football in the field nearby. After a few minutes, the girl came around the corner with her shopping bags, her face puzzled. "What's going on?" she asked her. Hanan walked over and picked up a few of her bags. "Let me help you carry these to your house," she said, a little too loudly. "We must talk now, so let us walk and pretend things are normal."

As they began walking, Hanan whispered, "I have seen you in the alleyway." She looked at the girl from the corner of her eyes, and saw her cheeks tinge slightly. "I kept your secret, but others must have seen you too. The women have been talking. I don't know what's gotten into you, but you need to stop seeing that boy before you both end up..." her voice trailed off.

"We haven't done anything!" her whisper was fierce and defensive. "We are in love, and want to marry, but his family says he isn't ready yet. What am I to do? But I swear by my Lord that we haven't even kissed. We only talk, and hold hands." She smiled

dreamily, and Hanan knew she must have been thinking of the latest sweet words he'd whispered to her.

"If your father or brother hears of this, what will become of you?" she whispered urgently. Have you no concern for yourself? If he loves you so much, why is he putting you in these impossible circumstances?" The girl stared down at the road as they walked along, silent. Hanan continued, "End it before it's too late. You know it is an impractical situation. Your family would see you married to the man who has a home, land, a steady income, a good lineage, and an even temperament. Only the lucky receive love in the bargain. If you continue, there will be no one to marry you, your family will be shamed, and in the end, this man who says he loves you will marry another, whether it is two or twenty years from now. Only your name will remain soiled from this whole business."

The girl lashed out angrily, "Who cares about names and honor? What is any of this when we endure quietly in marriages we don't want, with men we feel nothing for? Just so people can say, 'Ah, she is *bint halal*, a fine woman.' We live in this village, dreaming of going to the city, when we know it will never happen, that the only place we are going is to our husband's home. We spend our girlhood helping our mothers take care of fathers and brothers in the home, and spend our womanhood taking care of husbands and sons. Things are changing in the Arab world, but not in Kfar Hajar. If we were in the city, we would have a world of opportunities open for us. But there is nothing for us in this village, with this backward culture that would consider me evil for wanting to make my own decisions and follow my own heart." Her nose was flared, her face flushed a deep red.

Hanan responded, "Does he feel the same way about our society as you?"

"Yes. He often agrees with me when I say these things to him, and shares the opinion that our people must change our customs and thoughts."

Hanan swallowed before asking, "Then why does he make any commitment to you dependent on what his family wants? Why not

break with these customs and marry you without their permission or backing? It seems to me that he finds himself held back by the same culture you condemn, and that he claims to want no part of.”

The girl stopped walking, and stared at the wall in silence. Hanan thought she looked tired, and realized that she must have this same debate in her head on a daily basis. Finally, she turned to Hanan, and sighing, said, “It isn’t as though I’ve not thought of these things before. He—he did ask me once to...do things with him, and I refused. Not only because of what you said, but because deep inside, I am like all the other girls here: jealous of my virtue and craving honor and respectability. Because despite my big talk, the truth of the matter is that I am still in the home of my father, and no one guards our traditions more zealously than my father. Despite my own intelligence, and what I want out of life, even I know that the reality is that I will never have these things, and that I will grow up to be just like my mother, or your mother, or any of the women here.”

Hanan glanced away, embarrassed, when she saw tears hovering at the brims of the girl’s eyes. She placed her hand on the girl’s shoulder, the only way she could think to show her support. If not for her actions, than for her words, at least. “I, too, think of such things. Not in the same way you do, of course, but I also think about our fates here as women. We both did well in school, and yet, we don’t have the money for University, and our families don’t permit us to work. Do you know that I have American citizenship from my father, and yet my father will not hear of us going to America to study? He says the West will spoil us. We spend our days working in the home, and our afternoons engaging in petty, boring talk with other women about who has the nicest furniture and makes the best *mensaf*.

“I began to study our religion because it was the only acceptable thing left to me. But what I’ve learned set a small fire alight in my heart. Because I have learned that our religion does not condone letting the brains of girls and women go to waste. I have learned that among our Mothers were those who held their own businesses, with the blessing of our beloved Prophet, *aleyhi salatu wa salaam*. Islam

says that our money is ours alone, and that our property is ours alone. These men who terrorize daughters and sisters into giving up their shares of inheritance are going against what Allah wants. There is so much that the men and women in our country do which goes against what Allah wants for us. I have learned all of this, and more about our religion. What we learned of Islam when we were children was only to keep us in line with what our culture demands of us.

“Do you know what the worst part is? I can’t do anything about it. I can’t change our people’s minds. I can’t go on TV and tell them the truth in between their soap operas and comedies. And even if I could, they would reject it flat out, since the truth is that no one here wants to change the way things are done.” Now, it was Hanan’s turn to have teary eyes.

The girl stared at her. Then she said slowly, “They always say it is the religion...I have come to hate it. I have never heard anyone teach these things you say. Can this possibly be true?” She shook her head, and looked amazed.

“Yes, it is true. However, Islam does not allow for you and your friend to continue meeting in secret. The Prophet has said that where a man and woman are alone, the Devil is the third. Even if you’ve not done anything *haram* so far, there is no doubt that eventually, you will. The Prophet said marriage is half of our *djyn*. Your friend should marry you without constraint or delay if his salary can support you. If he comes to your family with honor and humility, before the gossip reaches the ears of your parents, I can’t see why they wouldn’t allow you two to marry. But you must stop meeting him, if not for your *djyn*, then for your safety, and his as well.”

Just then, a car honked, and the girls moved to a wall on the side of the narrow street to allow it to pass. Jolted back into reality, the girl picked up her shopping bags. “I have to go home now, to help Mama make supper. I would like to continue our discussion, and borrow some of the books you have read. I will come to your house tomorrow after we finish the housework, about eleven, okay?”

Hanan agreed, and the girls embraced. "*Salaam 'Alaikum ya Hanan,*" the girl whispered into her ear.

"*Wa laikum salaam,*" she whispered, as she turned back to go to her home.

Although Hanan knew that she was still destined to become a village wife like her mother, she began to feel less stifled with her like-minded friend. Almost every morning, after the chores were done, they would sit together in Hanan's courtyard. Underneath the jasmine trees and grape vines, they would read, discuss, argue, and dream aloud. They brought each other the latest news of the sweeping social revolution that was taking the Arab world by storm. The Arab world had been deeply shaken by the recent loss of Jerusalem and the West Bank in the war; the collective confidence of the Arabs had been shattered. Out of that came a new—almost new—society.

All over the Arab world, women were going to college. In Algeria, the women were active members of the resistance, and served as role models for Arab women living under occupation in Palestine. In Egypt, one saw women doctors and scientists, and women active in the Communist and Islamic parties.

But in Hanan's village, as in many villages, nothing changed. They read and heard about these changes taking place in the capital, but while it was only a short car ride away, it might as well have been on the moon. The revolution passed them by, and things in Kfar Hajar remained as they had been for generations. Hanan and the other young women could only sit and watch. Change came slowly, if ever, to Kfar Hajar.

These cherished morning visits were the only thing that kept Hanan's bitterness and despair at bay.

She never knew how the family found out. Had the gossip finally reached their ears? Had a "concerned neighbor" told them? Or had a family member seen them? In the end, how they found out wasn't significant. The fact that they knew was enough.

Deep down, Hanan knew it wouldn't have mattered if they had stopped the meetings yesterday or a month ago. Once word of just one meeting reached the ears of her family, it was only a matter of time before a cousin or brother, or even her father took action against the girl to "purify their name." The villagers gossiped about that day in whispers for years.

The fact that they knew came to light in the most terrible way. Hanan still had nightmares about it. It was a late Friday afternoon, after the village families had shared a big dinner with their families. People were relaxing and talking, children were playing outside. They had confronted the girl in the house, the whole family, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, and her parents. At one point, the girl ran out of the house, but why? Where was she going? In their village, there was no place that the girl could have hidden, no place for her to disappear to.

Her male relatives came after her, her father taking care to lead them, to show that fatherly affections could be discarded when the family name was at stake. They found her hiding in a small olive grove near the school, and her brother grabbed her by the hair and started to lead her back home.

It was the screams of the girl that brought the rest of the villagers running out of their homes towards the school. Hanan stood with her family, her father at her side. She saw her friend struggling to free herself from the grasp her brother had on her ponytail. Her face was red, tear-stained. Her grim faced father and uncles were following behind her, yelling, arguing, condemning.

A villager who must not have known the story shouted out, "Hey! What's the matter with you? Be gentle with her. What horrible thing could she have done that you have to drag her by the hair?"

Her father stopped, and faced the crowd of villagers. "How many of you know? How long have you known?" Some of the villagers looked away, or looked down at the ground. Hanan caught a glimpse of Umm Ayman. She no longer looked smug, but scared. "And you never thought to tell me?" he roared. "My name, my honor, all that I

have worked for, everything I've done for you—it means nothing to any of you? My whole life you've known me, but let me suffer as the fool?" And in a surge of rage, his hand swung out and hit his daughter in the chest, sending her to the ground, screaming. Her brother stood there with a chunk of her hair in his hand.

Her friend stood up, facing the villagers, desperate to make her case. "I did nothing! I did not give away my honor, and have done nothing to shame my noble father and our family! All of you have known me to be a good girl since birth. Please talk some sense into my good father!" Still, the villagers remained silent, looking away from her. The frantic girl's eyes searched the crowd before her eyes met Hanan's.

"No, no, no, no, please, no," Hanan silently begged. She slightly shook her head, to warn her friend, to beg her not to say anything.

But her friend's life was in danger, and before Hanan knew what was happening, her arm lifted up and her finger pointed to Hanan. "She knows! She knows I have done nothing! Ask her, she will tell you, I didn't do anything with that boy. Hanan, tell them!"

The entire village shifted their gaze away from the girl to Hanan. Hanan felt as though her body had been set on fire, a quick burn rising from her feet to her head. She started to shake, and she had a sharp, stabbing pain in her stomach.

The girl's father fixed his eyes on Hanan. "Is this true? Did you know? Did you know and say nothing to my wife? Tell me!"

Hanan struggled to meet the eyes of the villagers. She scanned the crowd slowly, before turning to face her parents, brothers, cousins, aunts, and uncles. Shame and confusion had taken root in their faces, and she saw that her father's coal black eyes were smoldering.

Her father gripped her upper arm, and hissed into her ear. "Is it true, Hanan? Did you know about this? Tell them, tell us." His hold was painful, and she imagined the bruises that he might be leaving

on her. Someone, a relative, pushed her from behind, and said, "Go on then!"

The girl's father strode up to them, and again he shouted at her. "Tell me, what do you know about my daughter?"

Hanan shifted her gaze slightly to the right, and looked at her friend. Her swollen eyes pleaded with Hanan to speak up and exonerate her. She slowly turned to look at her parents, and saw the fury and shame in their faces. She opened her mouth, but nothing came out. She gulped at the air like a fish pulled from the ocean.

Her father leaned over and whispered into her ear, "Tell him now."

She looked at her parents, at her family, at the girl's father, and the villagers surrounding her.

"I-," she stopped. "I-," she looked at her parents again, at their barely contained anger, and dreaded what would come later. "I...I...I don't know anything about it! I don't know what she's talking about! Please, leave me alone!"

The girl sent up a wail of pure desperation and mourning. Hanan's mother breathed a sigh of relief and her father loosened his grip on her arm. Hanan twisted loose from his grasp, and she turned to run from the crowd. Hanan looked over her shoulder, and caught sight of her friend, crumpled in a heap in the dirt, sobbing with abandon.

It was the last time she would see her.

Rima started as she realized that tears were flooding down her cheeks. Hanan sat in front of her, looking older now than she had an hour earlier, her eyes closed, and her hand pressed to her chest, as though to staunch the pain there. After a few moments, she opened her eyes, and Rima saw that they were wet.

"Her father, your grandfather, had a heart attack a few years after that. It may seem strange, but he could never get over what he

had done to her. He was a changed man; he aged fifteen years overnight. It took awhile, but eventually your grandmother was accepted back into the village women's social circle. She took a strange sort of pride in what had happened, and I could never be in the same room as her after that.

"As for your mother's cousin...well, he became a hero of sorts didn't he? The fourteen year old boy who restored his family's honor." Hanan pressed her lips together in disgust.

"I could never go and visit your aunt in her resting place. I was too ashamed. Ashamed of what I had done, and ashamed that they would have understood why I did it. We spoke so much about how we would be different..." her voice trailed off.

"How did you get away?" Rima whispered to her.

"My father came here to work after the Second World War, and became a citizen. I had an American passport. About a year after this happened, my father had changed his mind about me studying and working. I studied to be a nurse, and took a job at a hospital in a nearby city. Within two years, I had hidden away enough money to buy an airplane ticket to New York. I forged my travel papers, stole my passport when he was out of the house, and one day I went off to work and never came home.

"I changed my name when I came here, so that no one could ever connect me with Kfar Hajar. When I saw that computers would become the wave of the future, I took another degree from night school. I never contacted my family, and do not know what ever became of them." She pressed her hand a little harder against her chest.

"How come you never got married?"

"How could I get married after what happened? I knew that I did not deserve that type of happiness, or the blessings of having a family, when I had helped deny these very things to my friend. I have instead spent my life working, giving in charity, fasting, praying, and beseeching God to forgive me for what I did to her. The loneliness

I've had over the years is small compared to what happened to her. I lived in fear in Kfar Hajar, and that fear allowed me to help kill another human being. The biggest lesson I learned from that day is never to fear anyone except my Lord."

Rima sat quietly for a few minutes, before rising. "Thank you, Ms. Hamdan. I had an idea of what happened, but I needed to hear the truth from you. To this day, no one in my family speaks her name except my mother, and she only does so in secret whispers. I'm not sorry if I've troubled you, because I've been waiting my whole life to know what really happened that day. I'm not sorry, because the least she deserves is the truth, and we both know that. I'm going to write about this, because I want people to know and think about these secrets of our culture. I will not mention your name, though, you can trust me on that."

Hanan looked back at her, and tilted her head to the side, as if in thought. "No, I'm not sorry you came here, Rima Daraghmeh. The truth had to come out at some time. Maybe in this time, we are far away enough and educated enough to talk about these things. And maybe we aren't." She sighed, and rubbed her chest with her fist. "I suppose you'll find out when you write your story."

Hanan showed her out of the house, and watched her walk down the drive to her car and drive away. Then she closed the door, and slid to the floor against it, releasing her burden with a cry to heaven.

Winner of 2002 Andalusia Prize

War Dreams

Naseem Tarawnah

Samer is an Iraqi barber
he reeks of sweat and cheap cologne
the wretched scent of a homeland
he has long overgrown

Samer wanted to be a doctor
but his dream conflicted with a war
he was unfit for military service
because he didn't know what he was fighting for
Samer dreamt of being a doctor
but this massively conflicted
with his financial status quo
what a fate to be inflicted

Exiled to Lebanon
Samer cut hair in Beirut
he lived his youth out in the 80's
it was there he learned to shoot
for it took him years to own his shop
to have his name above the door
in the darkness, with a rifle
he'd lay huddled on the floor
for his dream of being a doctor
conflicted with a civil war
that he wanted only to survive
because he didn't know what they were fighting for
and when the rubble settled
and his shop was filled with holes
he went back to Iraq
on the heels of his soles
and at the ripe age of 30
he wanted to be a doctor
but his dream conflicted with a war
so for months he lived in prison
for not knowing what he was fighting for
For months all he saw were bars
his whole life whittled down to this
all he saw were bars
he beat the walls down with his fists
until some fat men struck a deal

and he was an exile once again
deported from his homeland
time and time again
see his whole life
was one colossal contradiction
his mind kept telling him to leave
but his heart had such conviction
it never gave him time to grieve
such desire to return
Samer beat his mind into submission
to alter gravity's direction
he put his heart in its position

So after several hundred years
and several hundred hairs
in Amman he lived his 30's in the 90's
a decade on barber shop chairs
and every single day
the customers came in
they talked on and on and on
about how Iraq's situation was grim
like a dagger to his heart
their words kept stabbing back at him
these wounds he could do without
but it was like the only subject matter
they could talk about
behind smoke screens of cigarettes
their words uninvited
with Turkish black coffee
their thoughts were shortsighted
Samer, who wanted to be a doctor
whose life conflicted with a war
Samer cut their hair in silence
because he didn't know what they were fighting for

Years later he'd return
to see if he could create
a life for both his sons
to be doctors; to be great
though his city laid in ruins
and the streets they reeked of death
so impoverished were these people
newborns never had a second breath
see those fat men that cut a deal

they traded oil in for some food
which meant if you didn't have an income
then you were pretty much screwed
and this broken man; this barber
he simply had to leave
the gravity of this situation
never gave him time to grieve

Samer left behind this life
His mind had overcome his heart
Tangled in such sorrow
Like a broken piece of art
Samer is an Iraqi barber
he reeks of sweat and cheap cologne
the wretched scent of a homeland
he has never overgrown
Samer cuts my hair
in a Toronto urban shop
mostly from the sides, just a little from the top
I come only to let him tell his story
to give him room to breathe
even when I don't really need the cut
it gives him time to grieve
and on cold November nights
he says, in the company of his wife
his children and brother
his home and this life
on the TV, in the papers
there's talk about a war
he looks around this room
to remember what he's fighting for
Samer
who wanted to be a doctor
whose life conflicted with a war
Samer
in his 40's
who never knew
what all of this
was for

Water

Naseem Tarawnah

Dreaming, I awake in a pool of sweat
Reciting ancient stories that shimmer
In fragile water rings
And I immersed, come struggling up for air

Panicking, Hajar returns to find her baby's fists
Calling blue water from yellow sand
She gathers the fate of the world in her palms

Like Nuh, calling his son from the ark
On arrogant peaks he turns his shoulder
The tide rises; the mountain holds its breath

Or Yusuf in a well, caravan pulling up a rope
Rain falls for 7 years, Earth dries for 7 years
From slave to brother, only one drop crafting fate

Like Musa, walking the wet ocean floor
Two waves, mountain high, paused yet breathing; waiting
Perhaps wondering why they are no longer embracing

Like Mohammad with his hands immersed:
Water flows. Wounded and bloody,
Future martyrs drink with tips of spears in their shoulders
thirst: an enemy in the desert

Like Hud disappointed; great black clouds carry no rain: only wind
Yunus swallowed in the belly of a whale, in the belly of a sea
Iblis from fire, Adam from dripping wet clay, flames grow softer

To Allah, who asks
"We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?"
A creation unacquainted with itself
Oblivious to the flow between the veins
Like a fish that does not know water
Until it has tasted air

Like the old man in a mosque
Washing his face, teaching his grandson
Rules of ablution
And life floweth through the palms of his withered hands

Somewhere, an ocean sighs
And foolish I, thought this world was made of something inexplicable

Wedding at Winston Manor

Hina Abbasi

My friend is getting married today. I have been looking forward to the wedding for months and now, it is finally here!

My outfit is ready and fully coordinated with matching accessories. I had my aunt bring it for me from a boutique in Pakistan. Cost around 300 dollars. Wait till everyone sees it. Wait till everyone sees me. They usually see me in Western clothes and not too much makeup on, but I am going to surprise them tonight. They have no idea how good I can look once I decide to get dressed up. Oh Allah, make me the most beautiful girl there.

Time to get ready.

I had my face threaded two days ago so that it wouldn't be red on the day of the wedding. That Hindu lady at Payal's Beauty Salon always makes my eyebrows asymmetrical. I tweezed three hairs out of my left eyebrow and one out of my right with mild annoyance. If I wasn't afraid of giving bad *dawah*, I would have told her off for doing such a terrible job.

Took a shower this morning and exfoliated my face with a mild toner so that the foundation would come on evenly in the evening. Put lots of moisturizer on after cleansing and exfoliating. Eight hours later my face is ready to be worked on. First comes the concealer under my eyes to hide the natural darkness of the area. Now comes the foundation all over my face. Now the powder to set the foundation in place. I use three shades of eye shadow to make my eyes seem naturally dramatic. Next, a 'thin' line of eyeliner that can't be easily seen and looks 'natural'. Then a coat of mascara. Now comes the lip liner and lip-gloss. A light dusting of blush, and voila, I am a super-hottie and it all looks natural.

A *lehenga* with a matching shirt, a hijab and some high heels. I love high heels. I love how they make me walk. I feel like a graceful gazelle when I have my high heels on. So much grace and fluidity in

my walk. I feel bad for those girls that don't know how to walk in high heels.

Hmm, got my clothes on (and made sure to wear my best padded bra), now it's time to arrange my hijab. Ok, which pin should I use? They are all so pretty and shiny. I think I will use this purple crystal looking one. There, it's in. Now the back of my head will look beautiful too.

I need perfume. I mean I know some people are really against women wearing perfume but c'mon, I don't want to smell. It isn't Islamic to smell bad. Besides, I am going to be on the women's side of the hall and the men won't be able to smell me. The most they can do is see me. A couple of sprays of 'Divine' are ok.

Now, for the *chooriyan*. I really like their colors, their femininity and the sound they make as they move around on my wrists. Oooh! Speaking of sound, I must wear my *payal*! I know no one will actually 'see' them, but still, I love the sound they make when I walk. The sound of the bells reminds me of all those old romantic Indian movies where the heroine's entrance would always be accompanied by the sound of the *payal* on her feet.

At the wedding

I came into the building and headed straight for the bathroom. I don't want to enter the hall until I am sure everything is perfect. After fixing my *dupatta* and reapplying my powder and lip-gloss I decided I was ready. Time to make my entrance.

Walked in with a smile on my face and went straight to the auntie-table. Ami taught me to always rush to say salaam to my elders. So I went and said salaam to each auntie and gave each one a kiss while they admired my clothes and complimented me on how good I looked and how sweet and respectful I was. I looked down, smiling with embarrassment, and said that everyone looked so beautiful tonight. I then joked with the aunties in Urdu about how pretty they looked. That's what ya gotta do and what ya gotta say.

Time to take inventory. Lots of men here but maybe 3 beards total amongst them. What a shame. Where did all the religious guys go? I look too damn good right now to have it all wasted on loser guys who I don't consider religious enough to marry. What the hell! Oh well, I might as well be 'pretty' anyways so that the aunties can remember me and then later try to hook me up lovely when they know of someone religious...On second thought, some of these guys are really cute; maybe they could become religious later. I am sure if one were interested in me I could talk to him and teach him Islam and get him into it and stuff. I mean, if I have enough guts to wear a hijab in a non-Muslim country then I should also be confident enough to be able to explain the basics to a Muslim guy. Besides, once he likes me and can do nothing but think of how to get me, it will be a lot easier to convince him to get religiously involved in the MSA and grow a beard.

The band just started playing some Indian songs. I wish this thing were separated so that I could dance. I just learned how to dance to a recent Indian song and I would have no problem performing it to make the women happy if the men would just leave. But alas, they won't. The music is so irresistible, though. I will just have to suffice by moving my shoulders with the beat. I totally can't help myself.

It's been an hour and thus far I have gotten a compliment from every person I've met. It's fun to be pretty. It makes me feel powerful. In control. There is something about walking across a hall with confidence and knowing that the eyes of everyone are upon you. Knowing that men that usually keep their gaze lowered have looked at you more than once and keep looking up and looking down. Looking up and looking down. So amusing. Knowing the girls are envying you and wishing they were as pretty (I had to read *Surat Al-Falaq* at least 5 times!). Knowing that the unmarried are trying to think of ways to get with you and the married are wishing that they had married you. So what if they are my friend's husbands. Big deal. They see pretty girls all the time; they should be able to deal with me. Besides, it's not MY fault if they don't know how to lower their gaze. I mean c'mon, I am covered; I am wearing a long loose *lehenga*, and

long shirt. Plus I am even wearing a hijab for heaven's sake and covering what Allah told me to cover. I am not to blame.

Time to eat. I hate eating at weddings. First of all, that video guy always likes to videotape people while they are eating. No way I want footage of me being anything less than dainty. I gotta make sure I eat very carefully, taking small measured bites and being very careful. Besides, I don't want any guy who is watching me (I absolutely can't help it if he is) to think I eat improperly or that I eat too much or something. I don't want him to think that I will grow up to be one of those obese women who eat a lot and get ugly. I have to make sure I get salad and not fill more than a third of my plate with food. I am not that hungry anyway.

I just spotted a young woman in a sari. She looks beautiful. Very elegant. I could see others looking at her. For a second I was even intimidated—but not for long. It hit me: she doesn't wear a hijab. That means that as beautiful as she is, her target market is completely different from mine and I have nothing to worry about. No crossing of turf. The type of MSA guys who I am into would naturally not be interested in her because she looks too liberal and would require a lot of work to get amalgamated into the religious scene. What a blessing it is to be guided to the treasure and liberation that is hijab—and to the MSA, too!

I love going on stage and having my picture taken. You know it's interesting how everyone in the hall watches the people who are getting their picture taken. It's like one of those times when you are allowed to stare at people as much as you want and it's okay. I saw some of the bearded guys staring while I was on stage and having my picture taken. I knew it; I knew they weren't as religious and pious and in control as they tried to project. I would never want to marry a religious guy with wandering eyes, that's so hypocritical! Whenever I am walking past a group of guys I make sure that I lower my gaze so that they understand that I am not the type of girl who runs around checking guys out and who thinks it's okay for guys to do that to her. I don't think I am a saint or anything but I am too religious for that. This *ummah* has issues.

An uncle just checked me out. Ewwwwww. That's so gross. I don't know why society doesn't do something about all these perverted uncles that run around checking out girls their daughter's ages at weddings. You would think that they would know by now how control themselves. It's sick.

Back home - 2AM

You know, I don't thank Allah enough. I mean, I am gorgeous; my mom was right all along. I never asked to be this way and I didn't have a right to it. I just lucked out. What blessing don't I have? I am a beautiful, intelligent, well-dressed woman and I am religious! No wonder the guys and aunties love me. I need to change and wash my face and do *wudu* so that I don't miss *Isha*. My other friend's wedding is coming up in two weeks. I need to figure out what I am going to wear. I hope Fatima's cute older brother comes...

When I Prayed with Farida Qader

Corey Habbas

Sitting
against wood pressing hard
pushing me forward
as verbal waves ricochet
hands clasped
out of place under a steeple
bearing no resemblance to praying
with Farida Qader

Taking cover
under sky
so ceaseless, captured
in memory, the last time
I covered; small little girl with a star
patterned blanket
over her head
in a dark room
after a nightmare

She could not escape
what I could overcome
by waking.
Farida Qader had screamed;
no voice.
She had run desperately
in place,
scars revealing her efforts
upon skin the color of wet sand.

Back lit
by the glow of Venus
resting above the ocean line
she handed me coral silk
as wind lifted the cloth of her hijab;
floating, like gulls soar on a current.
We had already washed
with a wave polished stone.

Speaking
for me in contemplation,
sun flew away forming

the shadow I owned
before my existence

Asking
for her- could she repatriate to
the robbed land where
her countrymen
wait on rooftops
to die
from metallic rain?

Perhaps I will find her again at Maghreb
after I have reconciled myself with Allah, she may be
kneeling on her hands
and legs tucked under
pushing through lighter grains
the hue of linen falling
in tones under the rising moon.

you do not remember

Roger Abdul Wahhab Boase

for Mansur

you do not remember now
what you saw and heard in Fez
perched on your push-chair
on the long balcony
above our little square

the flute player with a grin
who would play a tune for one dirham
then pause to receive another
an old man in a turban
squatting on the dusty ground

the ecstatic threatening din
of Isawiyya dervishes
playing wedding pipes and drums

they invade the neighbour's house
welcomed by running women
dressed in their best djellabas

the call to prayer soon after noon
the queue of Friday beggars
sharing their booty beneath a tree

the whisper of the breeze through the olives
silvering the undersides of leaves

the man with a mule carrying salt
or a loaf of solid sugar
to sweeten a pot of fresh mint tea

the noise of a game of football
the rough and tumble of growing up

the wail of a boy being bullied
followed by the voice of Monsieur Tazi
summoning his son to the midday meal

the dazzle of a whitewashed wall
the smell of couscous from the kitchen
and the sound of your father's car
parking at last on the lane
Dada you shout jumping for joy

the road to the unfinished mosque
where we used to walk before dusk
the growl of a dog behind a gate

the cake specially made for your birthday
with a palm a star and a crescent moon
baked at the pâtisserie near the Hôtel Splendide

that all too brief and formative year
a world disappearing fast
a place you may one day share
those glimpses of a vanishing past

Winner of 2004 Andalusia Prize

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