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The Enemy, and: Two Strangers, and: He Says to Her: If Only
I Were Younger

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THE ENEMY

Translated from the Arabic by Mustapha Marrouchi

I was there a month ago, a year ago. I was always there. It is as if I had been only there. In 1982, we went through what we are going through today. They surrounded us, they killed us and we fought back against what was dealt us from hell. The dead martyrs do not look like one another. To each his stature, traits, eyes, name and age. But the killers look like one another. They are one who multiplies behind missiles, presses electronic buttons, kills and vanishes. They can see us but we are unable to see them. Not that he is a specter but because he is the cold, faceless front of an idea . . . featureless, blind, ageless, without proper names . . . He has . . . He chose to bear one name: enemy!

MAHMOUD DARWISH

TWO STRANGERS

Translated from the Arabic by Mustapha Marrouchi

He looks at the sky
and sees a star
looking back at him!

He looks at the valley
and sees his grave
looking back at him!

He looks at a woman
who torments and attracts him,
but she doesn't look at him!

He looks at himself in the mirror
and sees a stranger, like him,
looking back at him!

Athar al-Farâsha, 13, 34

HE SAYS TO HER: IF ONLY I WERE YOUNGER

Translated from the Arabic by Mustapha Marrouchi

He says to her: If only I were younger . . .
She says: the night will make me blossom
like the scent of a jasmine flower, in the summer
and she adds: And you, you will grow younger
while sleeping because everyone who sleeps is a child.
As for me, I will stay up all night,
so that my eyes grow dark.
Two traces of deliberate sleeplessness will be enough
to add a few years.
I squeeze the juice of a lemon on my belly to wash away
the taste of milk and the scent of cotton.
I rub salt and ginger on my breasts
and my breasts become firmer.
He says to her: There is no room in my heart
for a garden, little girl . . . There is no time in my body for
tomorrows . . .
Take the time to grow up.
She says: Don't counsel me about love.
Take me that I may grow up!
Take me so that you may grow younger.
He says to her: Tomorrow when you have grown up,
you will say:
Oh I am no longer young!
She says to him: My desire is like a fruit
that cannot wait another day . . .
There is no time in my body
for tomorrow!

Ka-zahr al-lawz aw abb'ad, 56