



**THE NARCISSUS' TRAGEDY
THE SILVER'S COMEDY**

Translated by: Husain Haddawy

They returned
From the end of the tunnel to their mirrors .
Singly or in groups they returned,
When they regained their brothers' salt.
They returned from the legends
Of defending castles to plain speech.
They did not raise their hand or banners
To greet some miracles.
They returned to celebrate
The water of their being,
To make preparations
To marry their sons to their daughters,
To make a body hid in marble dance,
To hang from their ceilings
Okra, garlic, and onions
To dry for winter,
To milk the breasts of their goats
And the clouds seeping
From the feathers of the doves.
They returned with trepidation
To the map of divine enchantment,
To the carpet of banana trees
In the land of ancient vistas:

A mountain overlooking the sea,
Two lakes behind the memories,
A seashore for the prophets,
And a street for the scent of lemons.
The country was secure from harm;
Then rose the horses' din
And rose the Heksos and Tartars,
Masked and unmasked,
And immortalized their names
With spear or catapult;
Then they departed,
Without depriving April of its habits:
The rocks continued to bloom
The lemon blossoms sounded like bells,
And the earth was left unharmed
After their departure.

Land is inherited like language.
The horses' din rose and died down,
While the barley continued to grow.

They returned because they willed it so
And they rekindled the fire in their flutes,
And so the exiled returned from far,
In bloodstained garb,
Shining with joy like crystal,
And the song rose above the absence and the distance.
What weapons dare keep down the soaring spirit?
Every place of their places of exile
Lay free from harm.
They made their legend as they wished,
And to the pebbles praised the brilliance of the birds
Whenever they passed by a river,
They tore it and set it on fire with their longing,
And whenever they passed by a lily of the valley,

They wept and asked,
"Are we a nation or the wine of a new sacrifice?"
O song, take all the elements,
And lift us up, slope after slope,
And descend with us to the valleys.
O song, for you know best the place,
And you know best the time,
And know our capacity."

They never left, and they never returned,
For their hearts were almonds in the streets.
The squares were larger than a sky
That could not shelter them,
And the sea forgot them.
They knew their north and south,
And they let the doves of memory fly home
And caught from their martyrs
A star to lead them to childhood's wilderness.

Whenever they said, "We have arrived,"
Their leader fell down
On the starting point of the circle.
They said,
"O hero, press ahead,
That we may follow you to another end,
And down with the starting point!
O hero, bloodied with the tedious starts,
Tell us how many times will our journey
Be nothing but a start?
O hero, whose bier is the barley loaves
And the cotton balls,
We will anoint the wound that drains your soul
With dew and the milk of unending night
With lemon blossoms and stones stained with blood

With song, our song, and a feather
Plucked from a Phoenician bird."

Land is inherited like language.

Their song was a stone rubbing the sun.
Cheerful and laughing, they knew music and dance
Only at the funerals of departing friends.
They loved women as they loved
Fruits and principles and cats.
They reckoned the years by the ages of their dead
And often wondered,
"What have we done to the carnations
To be denied their company?
What have we done to the seagulls
To be living in seaports
And bitterness in an arid land,
Coming and going?"

They were what they had been
Like every river that desires no rest.
They wandered in the world, so that the road
Might save them from wandering.
Because of life they tasted
Only what little life cared to offer,
They cared not how they lived or died
Nor thought much of the afterlife.
What difference did it make for them
Whether it was Isaac or Ishmael
Who was God's sacrificial lamb?
Their hell was Hell itself.
They got used to plant the mint in their shirts
They learned to grow the ivy by their tents,
And they got used to store the violets
In their songs and the sarcophagi of their dead.

It did not harm the plants,
When their longing gave them body.

They returned before sunset.
They returned to their names
And the daylight at the flight of the swallow.
Exile is places and times which transform their victims.
It is the sundown when it falls
On windows overlooking nothing.
It is the arrival to the shores
On a vehicle which had lost its horses.
It is birds overpraising their singing
It is a country dependent on a throne,
Having reduced nature to body.

They returned from exile,
Having left their horses behind,
For they had shattered their legend
To break out of it,
To liberate themselves and think with their hearts.
They returned from the great legend
To recall their old days and their words.
They returned to their old selves,
Walking on the sidewalk, chewing
The cud of delicious languor,
Without concern for time, without aim,
Looking at the flowers as other people
Do, without much ado,
While the lemon blossom begot itself once more,
To open wide, at night,
The windows of old houses
On families in peace.

It was as if they did return
Because there was time enough
For the caravan to return
From its journey back from far off India
They repaired their carriages
And arrived before their news,
Having, above the windows of Central Asia,
Lit the star of memory.
They returned as if they did return;
They returned from the north of Syria,
From the small islands in the vast ocean,
From numberless conquests,
Numberless captivities.
They returned as the minaret's shadow
Hearkens to the call for the evening prayer.
The roads did not mock them,
As stranger mocks stranger.
The river was their feeling,
Whether faltering or bold,
Receding or flooding.
The banner of the willows
Was hung by a soothsayer
On the liquid gold of the moon.
They had their story, the one in which Adam
Their forefather in banishment,
Wept in regret as he went into the desert.
The prophets scattered everywhere,
And civilization departed,
And the palm trees departed,
But they returned as caravans,
Or dreams, or thoughts, or memories.
They saw in their old recollections
Hardships and trials enough to conjure Doomsday.
Was the desert vast enough to swallow Adam's ruin,
Adam, who near the apple tree

Poured into the womb of his wife
The honey of the first desire,
He who fought his death,
Living to worship his Almighty God,
Worshipping his Almighty God, that he might live?
Did the first murderer, Cain,
Know that his brother's sleep was death?
Did he know that he had not yet learned
The names of things, nor any language?
Was a woman clad in fig leaves our first map?
Under the sun there was no other sun,
Save the heart's light penetrating the darkness.
How many years had passed before they found
The answer to the question?
And what was the question, save
An answer without any question?
Such were the questions put by sands to sands,
To prophesy the known or the unknown,
A prophesy in ignorance,
For sand is sand.
The mystic takes a woman by surprise
To spin the wool of his gloom with his beard
And rise a crystal body.
Does the soul have haunches,
A waist, a shadow?
Captivity provided room enough
For the dark sun of doubt,
Ever since they were shut in.
Their freedoms were what fell from the heaven
Of the shattered absolute around their tents:
Helmets, armor, a blue ewer,
Weapons, human remains, a crow,
An hourglass, and grass covering a massacre.
They asked themselves,
Can we build our temple

On a cubit of the world to worship
Him who created the insects
And categories and foes
And the secret hidden in His flies?
Can we bring back the past
To the edge of the present,
To bow in prayer at our rock
To Him who has without writing
Written our fate in the Book?
Can we sing a song to a celestial stone,
So that we may endure the sagas,
The sagas which we can alter
Only by reading the cloud?
Will the surface mail reach us on the beak of a hoopoe,
Bringing our letter back from Sheba,
So that we may believe in the strange and marvelous?
There is room in the wilderness
For horses that leap to the heights
And roll down the slopes,
Room for riders who spur on the years.
The years are one long night,
And death is slaughter in the night.
O song, take all the elements,
And lead us back, age after age,
That we may find in human history
What may bring us from our tedious journey
Back to the place, our place.
Lift us to the tips of the spears,
That we may look on the city.
For you know best the place and our capacities,
And you know best the time."

O song, take me with Thou to a stone
That I may sit near distant guitar;
Take me to yonder moon,
That I may know how much remains of my wandering;
Take me to a string
That ties the sea to the receding shore;
Take me on a journey
That falters little in a tree's artery;
Take me to a rain
That falls on the roof tiles of our lonely home;

Take me back to myself,
That I may join my funeral
On my feast day;
Take me to my feast,
A martyr, in the violet of the martyr;
For they returned, but I did not return.
Take me from there to there,
From artery to artery.

They returned to homes within themselves
And regained the silken steps at the luminous lakes
And recovered what was lost from their lexicon:
Rome's olive trees imagined by the soldiers,
Canaan's sacred book buried under
The temples' ruins between Tyre and Jerusalem,
The trail of aromatic incense
Blowing from rosy Damascus
Toward Quraysh's land,
And the Deer of eternity
In her wedding procession
To the northwardflowing Nile
And to the Tigris, wild in manliness,
Conducting Sumer to immortality.

They were together,
They were together, fighting,
Winning and losing.
They were together,
Marrying and begetting the children of contention,
Or the progeny of madness.
They were together,
Siding against the North
And raising above Hell
A bridge to cross from Hell
To the triumph of their spirit
And waging the battle for reason
For he whose faith lacks reason
Has no soul.

They asked themselves,
"Can we transplant the power to create
From Gilgamesh who was denied the grass of immortality
And from Athena thereafter?
Where are we now?
Let the Romans freeze us in marble
And return the center of the world to Rome
And beget our ancestors
By the sway of their sword,
Yet we keep of Athena within us
What turns the ancient sea into our song,
And our song is a stone that rubs the sun
Within us, a stone that shines with our obscurity,
For obscurity is utmost clarity;
So how can we know what we have forgot?
Christ returned to Supper, as we had wished,
And Mary returned to him,
With her long braids with which to cover
The Roman stage within us.
Was there enough meaning in the olive grove

To fill his hands with the presence of God
And fill the wounds with basil
And pour out upon him
The radiance of our souls?

O song, take all thoughts,
And take us back, wound by wound.
Heal our forgetfulness, and take us,
As far back as you can, to early man,
As he shines, by his primitive tents,
The brasscovered dome of the sky,
Trying to see what lies hidden in his heart.
Lift us up, and take us down to the place,
For you know best the place,
And you know best the time."

They readied themselves in the passes for the siege.
Their shecamels thirsted,
While they milked the mirage,
To drink the milk of prophesy
From the imagination of the south.
In every place of exile, the siege left
A fortress with broken doors,
While behind every door a desert lay,
In which ended the long journey from war to war,
And for every thorn in that desert
A Hagar was exiled southward.
They passed by their names, engraved on metal and stone,
But did not recognize them,
For victims do not trust their surmise.
They did not recognize them,
For they were sometimes covered with sand,
Sometimes with the desert plants.
Had all flags been the same,

Their history would have been our history,
And all the nations would have had
One way of thinking
And one history.
And our end would have been our beginning;
Our beginning, our end.

Land is inherited like language.

Had twohorned Alexander had but one,
And had the world been bigger,
The easterner's name would have shined from its tablet,
The westerner a little farther from home.
Had Caesar been a philosopher,
His home would have been a little plot of land,
And our history would have been our history.
Let the Bedouin's palm tree reach,
On the road from Damascus, the Atlantic Ocean,
So that a cloud may quench our deadly thirst.
Their history would have been ours,
Our history would have been theirs,
Were it not for the dispute
Over Doomsday's date.
Who ever unified the stubborn earth,
Without the zealstudded sword?
None.
Who ever returned from a journey
To the tender years of youth?
None.
Who ever fashioned his life
Far from strong opposition and valor?
None.
There must exist a place of exile
That lays the pearls of memory
To reduce eternity,

And turn all time to a moment.
Perhaps they wrote their names over their names,

Recalling in the silver of the olive grove
The first poet who used it to shroud their sky.
They said,
"O Aegean sea, take us back, o sea,
For the family dogs are barking
To invite us back to our rich estate.
Victory is death,
And death is victory in Hercules,
And the martyrs' step is home.
We are the ones who set out,
In order to arrive and conquer.
The priestesses drove us away from home,
Without regard for our wives.
Some of us died, while those who remembered home
Slaughtered more old women and young girls
And hurled the children of the city
From their beds into the deep valley,
In order to return early from devilish Troy.
Did we betray our conscience
To cause our wives to betray us?
Our steadfast conscience was the bridge we crossed
And the ship that carried to them
The incense and beautiful Helen's perfume.
Victory, like defeat, is death,
And crime may lead to virtue.
O sea, you adorn with the slayer the slain.
O ancient sea, take us back
To our barking dogs in our native land,
And press the adventurous search
For what is left of our fleet,
Our old fishing boats,
And our men who have turned into coral trees

At the bottom of the sea.
Carry us, so that we may return from the war
Of defending the sanctity of the bed
To the beds of our women
And the tanned sheepskins
Which shine green in the ashes
And in our poets' dreams.
There must be a shore for us to land on
And reach the hazel tree in our yard.
For this light is not light enough
For picking our berries."

They were there, conversing with the waves
To imitate warriors
Marching under the triumphal arch, singing,
"Our places of exile have not been in vain,
Nor have we endured exile in vain.
Our men will die without regret,
And the living shall inherit the calm of the breeze,
Get used to opening windows,
See what the past has done to their present,
And weep quietly, quietly, lest the foes
Should hear the broken shards within.
O martyrs, you were right,
For in spite of the deception of the flowers,
Home is more beautiful than the road home.
But even though the windows have not opened yet
On the heaven of the heart,
And exile is exile, here as well as there,
We have not endured exile in vain,
Nor have our places of exile been in vain."

Land is inherited like language.

They did not look like captives,
Nor did they wear the freedom
Of the martyr for a mantle,
Nor escape the summer of their discontent.
Why did they set the distant mountain
On fire with their desolation
And disappear when they found
No paths down to the valleys?
Like primitive shepherds,
They may yet hearken to the echo
And find the remnants of their voice,
Their clothes, their war season,
And the modulations of their flutes.

They made for every nation a legend,
To emulate its heroes,
And in every war they lost a hero.
But every river has its course,
And the past is not such
That they might dwell above the river's mouth.

Their guitars place before me
Andalusia and a horse.
They said,
"O maiden of the wind,
Play for us on the needles of the pine,
So that we may love life.
Play the wind on the sandalwood,
Play for us that you may soften our hearts
And we may leave the harbor to the harbor.
Play for us with the rhythm of the wine
On the mysterious pupil of the eye,
That you may lead us now
Out of your great coral valley
And teach us the trade of joy,
Fortified by gypsy blood.
Play for us and for what shines from the heart,
Tapping with your high heels,
So that the nations may wake up
And see the cause of their wars:
A man looking for peace in the wilderness
And finding refuge in a woman."

High above the waves,
The waves of the desert and the sea,
They made an island for their existence.
Their poet sang,
"As I defend my journey

To my destiny, I defend my song.
Among the palm trees and their partial shades,
I shall rise from death and embrace life again
And shall leave for the lemon blossoms,
Far behind, the blue bridge hazy in the rain.
O singers, if you can restore
Their neighing to the horses,
Then go through, for the horses pant behind my heart,
As it leaps toward the barriers.
We are what we are,
And who can alter us?
Whether we return or not,
We march within ourselves.
When there comes a day without dying
And a night without dreaming,
We will reach the harbor, burning
On the fire of the last roses."

It was as if they did return,
Because the sea flowed down
From their fingertips and the side of the bed.
They saw their homes behind the clouds
And heard the bleating of their goats
And groped for the horns of the story's deer
And lit the fire on the hilltop
And gave each other cardamom
And kneaded the dough
For the pastry of the happy feast.
They asked each other,
"Do you remember our days of exile there?
They danced on their suitcases,
Laughing at their life in distant exile.
And at a country left empty of longing.
They asked, "Do you remember Carthage's last siege?"

Do you remember Tyre's fall
And the European kingdoms on the Syrian shore
And the great carnage in the Tigris,
When the ashes covered the city and the years?
"Here we are, back, O Saladin!"
So look for sons."
They repeated the tale
From its beginning to the time for laughter.
One day, tragedy may merge with comedy,
One day, comedy may merge with tragedy.
They mocked the Narcissus of tragedy,
And asked repeatedly
The silver of comedy,
"What will we dream of when we realize
That Mary was a woman?"
They smelled the grasses, as spring sprouted
With their wounds from the wall
And brought them back from every place of exile.
The bite of the flea is like the bite of the viper,
And the scent of basil is the coffee of exile,
A walkway for the emotions
When they walk in their proper homes.
They said, "We have arrived!"
They clapped for their dogs,
For their bleating goats,
For the ancestors of the story,
For the old ploughs,
And for the the sea caressing
The onions hanging
Above old weapons.
What happened happened.
The husbands joked with the wives
Of husbands laid on the bier for burial.
They said,
"Being done with the dancing and wailing

Of the hired women mourners,
O maiden, we tell now of hearts running
With the horses to meet the rising memories.
We tell how Hercules endured
His last blood and the mothers' madness,
And how we became him
And how we became Ulysses,
His opposite, when he sought yonder sea.
We tell, and as we do, we mention
The call of the Kurdish leader
To the wavering Arab,
'Bring your sword, and take from me
A blessing on the Prophet
And his companions and women,
And take your share of alms.'
They laughed heartily, saying to themselves
That prison may exceed in beauty exile's gardens,
And saw their windows open on their humor
And set their roses blazing on the shores.
What happened happened.
They will leap on the ladders
And open the coffers of memory
And the chests of clothes,
Sometimes polishing the door knobs,
Sometimes counting the rings.
Their hands and their gardens grew with the years,
Yet they failed to find their faces
On the rusty mirrors or the dirty glass.
So be it!
The garden will grow larger,
When they arrive, shortly before the singing,
And they will look behind, saying,
"We are what we are.
Who will drive us back to the desert?"

We will teach our foes a lesson
In agriculture and how to make
Water burst out from a rock.
We will plant pepper in the soldier's helmets,
We will plant wheat on every slope
Because wheat extends
Beyond the confines of silly empires.
We will adopt the customs of our dead
And wash off the rust of time
From the silver of the trees.

Our homeland must make us its own,
Its plants, its birds, its stones.
Our homeland must be our birth,
Our grandfathers,
Our grandchildren,
Our hearts treading
On the thorny rose of Jerusalem or grouse down.
Our homeland must let us fence in
With violets its fire and its ashes.
It must be our homeland,
Must make us its own.
Whether a paradise or misfortune,
It is just the same.

We will teach our foes how to raise doves,
If they will learn.
And we will spend our siesta
Under the shady vine trellis,
Surrounded by cats asleep under the filtered light,
By horses resting from their wandering,
By cattle slumbering and chewing the cud,
And by a cock that keeps awake
Because there are hens in the world.
We will spend our siesta

Under the shady vine trellis.
How tired we are, how tired from the sea and the desert."

They were returning and dreaming
That they had arrived,
Because the sea was flowing down
From their fingertips and the shoulders of their dead.
And they were suddenly looking at
The young bearded hero lying
On the bier of his last step.
And they were wondering,
"Does he lie dead here over his revolver,
In his silk brocade, at his final doorstep?
Does he lie dead here?
Here and now in the afternoon sun,
His fingers flashing the sign of victory,
Shaking the door of the old house
And the island's ramparts.
Now he has taken the last step to the door
And completed the march with the return of our dead.
And now the sea lies asleep
Under the windows of the little houses.
O sea, we have not sinned much.
O ancient sea, give us no other but ourselves.
We know that you are holding more victims,
And we know that the waters are the clouds."

They were what they had been.
They were returning and asking dark fate,
"Must a hero die before the vision
Grows greater and the stars multiply
On our banners?"
They could not add one more rose to the end
Or change the course of old legends,

For the song is the same song,
And there must be a hero who falls
At the triumphal arch, at the height of the song.
They sang,
"O hero who lives within us, wait.
Live one more night, so that we may reach
The end of a life
Crowned with a beginning without end.
Live one more night, so that we may complete
The journey of the bloodstained dream.
O crown of our valor,
Legends' twilight
Crowned with a beginning without end,
O hero, who survives within us,
Live one more hour, so that we may begin
Victory's sacred dance.
We have not triumphed yet.
Wait, hero, wait!
Why do you depart a moment before the goal?
O hero who survives within us, wait."

Exile's weary resignation was still within them,
Within them still a street to exile
And rivers without shores.
Within them still lay limpid narcissus,
Afraid of drying out,
Within them still what would change them
If they returned and did not find
The same anemones,
The same hardy quince,
The same daisies,
The same persimmons,
The same long ears of corn,
The same elder,
The same bundles of dry garlic,

The same oak,
And the same alphabet.
They were about to descend to their homes.
What dream would they dream,
From which dream would they emerge,
How would they enter the gardens,
While exile is exile?
They knew their way to its end,
And they dreamt it.

They returned from the future to their present,
And they knew what would happen
To the songs in their throats,
And they dreamt of the carnations
On the fence of the house
In their new place of exile.
They knew what would happen
To hawks if they settle in palaces,
And they dreamt of the struggle
Of their narcissus with Paradise
If it becomes their place of exile.
They knew what would happen to the swallow
When spring sets it on fire,
And they dreamt of the fitful spring of their feelings
And knew what would happen
When their dream arose from a dream,
Knowing that it was only dreaming.
They knew and dreamt and returned and dreamt
And knew and returned and returned and dreamt,
And they dreamt and returned.

Mahmoud Darwish

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