[Come here, Death, and let me feed you]

By Ahlam Bisharat

Translated from Arabic by Lena Khalaf Tuffaha



In this poem, Ramallah-based writer Ahlam Bisharat reflects on the myriad manifestations of death in Gaza. The poem was first published by Words Without Borders on March 6, 2024 in Against Silence: A Palestinian Writing Series.

Come here, Death, and let me feed you;
Here in the chicken coop.
Here in the lamb's pen.
Here are some greens.

There is a woman here, alone, watching Death,
trying to lull it to sleep
with her hands and to trap it
with the other domesticated animals.

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I'm flipping between news stations
and the words I used to listen to before I can no longer hear.
Even the moans of suffering that made me ache—I've stashed them away
in a bag of old laments. I've seen the photograph
of the entire family that died
so many times, there's no use in seeing it again.
The image of the boy with the curly hair
has been painted everywhere with all sorts of writings
that add nothing to his beauty.
I select a death among all the deaths
and I gather its parts to bury it,
to make space for a new kind of death.
Come and see—there are so many kinds of death!
So many but I favor one death over another
just as doctors to whom God granted employment in Gaza do
—did they know, when they took their oath, what their work would be?
I choose one death over another:
This is a death that cost its owner his life.
This one is an elegant death.
This one a terrified death.
This one a great death.
This one a beautiful death.
This is a death that was tardy but finally arrived,
this is death that never did.
This is the photograph of the lone survivor of the war
I walk around and around in my house holding it in my hands.
With time, none of this death will become a poem.
The dead will simply arrive after their long absence.

Ahlam Bisharat is a memoirist, essayist, poet, and author of young adult fiction. Two of her young adult novels, Code Name: Butterfly *and* Trees for the Absentees*, have been translated into English and published by Neem Tree Press. Bisharat is from Jiftlik, Palestine.*

Lena Khalaf Tuffaha is a poet, essayist, translator, and teaching artist. Her work has appeared in the Los Angeles Review of Books, The Nation, New England Review, Michigan Quarterly Review, and Poetry, *among others. She is the author of three books,* Water & Salt *(Red Hen), winner of the 2018 Washington State Book Award,* Kaan and Her Sisters *(Trio House, 2023), and* Something About Living *(University of Akron, 2024), winner of the 2022 Akron Prize. Tuffaha was the curator and translator of the 2022 series* "Poems from Palestine" *at the* Baffler *magazine.*

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