Two Poems

by Marah Muhammad Al-Khatib
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Unyielding
are the devil's eyes
when he lies
he doesn't blink
he stares
eyes devoid of fear
standing beside me
perhaps within me
he tells me a bedtime story
pulled from his imagination.

The devil
doesn't deny his maker
told me he was drunk
when he fled.
His cowardice doesn't shake me
it is
as if woven with measured ropes.
He knows he scares me
keeps on talking:
Some girls were crucified
Those were his children, he says.
He seeks vengeance for them—daughters
of fire, blood, and thirst.

He resurrects a skeleton before me
restores, to me, the very concept of humanity
nothing binds him to the diabolical
his eyes are before me
unyielding.

As for you,
malice hides deep within you.
The devil killed himself
and spared me
I sat there weeping
(or did I?)
No matter!
All I know is
I will not be hiding
I will beat fear into slender sticks
until my fire catches on his unyielding gaze
And I die a mournful death.
Yet
I know the devil's eyes
when he lies
unyielding.



During the timelessness of hazy visions
Days preceding my own by many decades
Fairuz, whose memory I behold, here in the Levant
between an alleyway and a small corner in Damascus
The memory of a girl, going about her day in Iraq—
to a young man, she's the anniversary of his migration.
Fairuz, through whom I see all things:
an ordinary life, wandering the globe
my hand reaching out, offering love without you asking
old romantic verses by the one I abandoned
my slow steps, as I move forward
I have no desire to keep up with a new life,
a clumsy routine, an early morning.
My own tedious time flows within me
I brewed my coffee with the heat of my own burning body
and my silent thoughts.
One meal a day and I return to brew another cup
hoping it intoxicates me
My auburn hair, its ends burning crimson
cascades over my entire body
Beneath it, I hide my silence, my solitude
That solitude is new to me
I've only known it a little, over a few days
When I realized I'm here
Alone
I spend the night with the darkness
chatting about my manifest dream
My eyes weary
My tears hidden behind hope
to hear Fairuz singing a new melody.
Alone
on a balcony with no air
I suffocate, grow intoxicated
Coffee cups multiply
stained with lipstick, overflowing with disappointment
taking me to a fresh bout of insomnia
and thoughts, buried before they could ever see the light.

Here I am
Listing to Fairuz, estranged from my own self
in a shrunken homeland, now too small to hold room for my dreams
the somber specters keeping company with
the clamor inside my head
For I have
gathered the memory of an encounter that has yet to happen
I craft it within me to fill my inner void
until the day I hide in his chest, then vanish.

The night's dream is love
napping on hope for the impossible.

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