

When It Rains in Gaza

—for *Deema Shehabi*

I.

I tap my cell to see
a dark-haired girl, flute-armed:

Amal salvaging history
texts from yesterday's

ancient ruins. Her home.
The walls around me

are stable. Among rubble
she rises in a green hoodie,

gripping a bent spine
of a book, its pages furling

dust. I'm not there or here
when she presses the book

to her chest, pauses to eye us,
then disappears inside the pages.

II.

Inside her book
is a tunnel dug at night—

not one, but dozens of them,
beneath the rubble and book

out of sight of surveillance
drones churning above,

hundreds yawning in the dark,
dug by shovel and hunger,

as if people were rodents
no walls could hinder:

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computers and donkeys,
brides and coils of rebar, small

arms, rockets, flour—white
blood cells of the stateless.

III.

And inside this bomb
is Rahed Taysir al-Hom.

Twenty years—with pliers
and screwdrivers, wire

cutters and silence
and patience and no body

armor—he dismantled
death, patiently defused

stray missiles, rockets, land
mines. He refused

no one. *Very brave,*
but slow; one man complained,

the bomb in our home
waiting for weeks. Until today.

IV.

When it rains in Gaza, the tin roofs clatter
so loud even the teacher can't be heard.

V.

Of fragment of metal,
propelled by farm

fertilizer and melted sugar.
Inside the slurry is anger,

analysis of angles and wind
resistance, deprivation

raised to a prayer.
Of the seventy mosques

and seven thousand homes
welcomed to oblivion,

which saw rockets designed
to return where ancestors lived,

a land they have dreamed
to touch with their feet?

VI. Al-Awda Means Return

What the al-Awda ice cream factory
(this is not news, this is not poetry)

in addition to storing medicine
may or may not have been hiding, since

the factory was bombed, we cannot know.
The owner says, *I live inside. I go*

to sleep listening to production lines.
No rockets made in here, just butter. Why?

It smells of burning plastic and butter.
How would it taste, the sweetness of return?

Because there was no room in morgues, babies
curled in ice cream freezers. And every day,

the sea churned a white froth, salting the air,
lapping the sand as if there were no war.

VII.

Above the tub, Salem Saoody leans,
grinning and palming the frothing water

over niece and daughter, their hair slicked
with soap, their bodies gleaming in the brisk

delight of being bubble-wet and clean. Pull
back. Around the tub, the ceiling in piles—

the walls just a few columns and open.
The whole neighborhood a roofless ruin,

a movie set for apocalypse. After.
Welcome to the desert of the real.

Just the tub survives this Operation
Protective Edge. So focus in: laughter

and water, froth and a father's smile.
The heart will break what the eye can't swallow.

VIII.

When it rains in Gaza, children run out
of noise, lift their open lips to heaven.

IX.

A jellyfish of smoke,
you say aloud, *look!*—

seeing the beautiful photo's
white tentacles and head

swimming the sky
before it falls. A privacy

of glass. Ripples
of division. Flesh

from flesh, true god
from true god, made

in the walled
island of unforgiven

and forgotten, dreaming
where the past will lead.

X.

When it rained in Gaza, the ancient graves
of Beit Hanoun revealed themselves again.

Two thousand years of silence, dark, and drought,
their yawning mouths speak: slaked, at last, by light.

XI.

A sky's eye, tracking
by heat of body,

a hive mind—locking
in its tar-

get. The dark
is white. The heat

of flesh is dark. Arms
rise—planting

black explosives,
or clipping black

linens to a black
line to dry

beneath a black
unmovable sun?

XII.

Operation Summer Rains tomorrow,
followed by Operation Autumn Clouds.

You can read all the statistics online.
The heroic couplet cosigns to a lie.

Operation Cast Lead will hit the coast,
then Operation Pillar of Defense.

Write: Israel-Palestine? Palestine-
Israel? Hyphens bridge, burn, or blind.

And then Operation Protective Edge.
Ceasefire. The advancing age of siege.

XIII.

Over the wall, other people stroll
the tree-green streets of Sderot.

Deep inside each mind, a missile itches
a place that only a missile can scratch.

Green is not just the color of Hamas,
but it is the color of Hamas. Hamas:

acronym for the Islamic Resistance,
Arabic for zeal, Hebrew for violence.

Did they know when they chose
their name? Hamas also means to seize.

XIV.

Deema, I want to soften the gnaw
of loss, break its teeth and plant them
in gardens, watch them grow

anchors in exile, your words
in my mouth migrating
back to you in California hills,

blooming with irises
and wildfire—but what do I know
of the migrant earth, as you

wrote, of entering a rooftop
in Gaza, watching your mother
widen into herself again, at home,

then having to part with your mother
again, at the country of skin?

XV.

The forecast for Gaza today: Pleasant.
Beautiful. A row of icons of sun.

XVI.

Flechette.
Little flesh?

False friend.
You crowd in,

thousands
per shell.

Little arrow,
you bend

when you
enter flesh,

break into
hook and fin,

catching heaven
with hell.

XVII.

Inside the bomb are many
thousand flechettes,
a future revenge, salt
of this sea, tunnel

blocked like a jaw,
the sweaty skull
of the lawyer called
to call the killing legal,

his uneasy dreams—
a black-haired girl
in a hoodie he saw onscreen—
she's gathering books

from debris, her mouth
moving as if to speak.

XVIII.

Amal, I pray you
have not folded

inside phosphorus,
or nestled beside

uneaten ice cream.
There is no us.

There is no them.
That by late light

this night, you read
until you believe

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the wall will fall
the siege will end

and missing walls
will rise again.