



Gulf University for Science and Technology

School of Art

Translation Project

(Salehah's Camel)

"ناقةُ صالحَة"

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1. Introduction

A. Source Text Analysis

The book I chose to translate is called (ناقاة صالحة) or as I translated it as (Salehah's Camel) by the author Saud AlSanousi. Saud is a Kuwaiti author that is part of Kuwaiti Writers Association. He won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction. The book was published in September 2019. It has a rating of 3.7 on Goodreads and many seem to enjoy it. It is the fifth work of the Kuwaiti novelist Saud AlSanousi, published by the Arab House of Sciences. The book revolves around Kuwait before the discovering of oil, in a tribal prescriptive. It talks about a girl, Salehah's who's tribe forced her to marry her cousin from her father's side, Saleh, even though she loves her cousin from her mother's side, Dakheel. The book ends with the tragic death of the beloved Salehah. The chapters are not numbered, instead they are named after who's point of view it is. I chose to translate these following pages: 49-92, which is in total 43 pages. These pages fall upon the point of view of Salehah.

B. Aim

I chose to translate this book because I have been always intrigued by translated literary works. For example, I am a huge fan of Fyodor Dostoevsky, but I am always let down with the way that translators chose to translate the works. Therefore I chose a book written by a Kuwaiti to translate to show the western literature lovers the talents of our local authors. I have also read this book before to review it for another project and was amazed with how this book was written and the terminology that was used. With all the different literature books that I have read in my life I have always wished that there was a book written that was enriched with the old Kuwaiti culture, to show how simple and beautiful it really is. And I think that this book shows how beautiful and simple the culture really is even though it ends with a tragedy. It will also make them learn some of the tribal customs and much more. Most people are familiar with typical love stories or tragedies, but what makes this book stand out is that it is indeed a tragic story but with a cultural twist. Another reason for my choice with translating this book is to this day people are suffering because their families disapprove of their marriages. These types of stories are best known in the middle east. It has been going on forever and will go on for years due to different doctrines, ideologies, and family backgrounds. I also adored how this book was rich with terms that were

new even to me. That is why when it was time to choose a good book to translate, this book immediately came to mind.

2. Framework of Translation

The translation theory I chose for translating this book is by Venuti. I chose Domestication and Foreignization because I wanted to show the beauty behind the text and did not want to change much of it. And if there is anything that I wanted to change it was just broad terms and not important ones that will confuse readers. Wenfen Yang briefly gives a broad example about both domestication and foreignization and how it affects the text. "Domestication and foreignization are two basic translation strategies which provide both linguistic and cultural guidance." (Yang, 2010, p. 77). Domestication is used to minimize the foreignness of the text. On the other hand, foreignization is basically leaving the text as it is with its foreignness. In some cases, I used foreignization because I wanted to preserve the cultural sense from the Source Text into the Target Text. In other cases, I chose to use domestication because as much as I want people to know about our culture, it is also very important to me that they understand it.

3. Analysis of Data (Target Text)

Challenges and Examples

Most challenges I faced with this text are the conversations that happen in Bedouin slang. For example: "تراه جلد حویر فوق عیدان" in this case I domesticated that phrase and translated it as "it's a calf's skin on top of twigs". The reason for my choice of domesticating this phrase is because in this part he was describing what the instrument, the rebab, is made of. The rebab is a singular string instrument that is known in the Arabian region, but it might be new to other readers. Another challenge I faced is the terms of relation in the text, for example "ابن عمي، ابن خالي" both translate into "My cousin" even if it is a female. So, I found myself explaining in specific detail on who is that person. Therefore, I would say something along the lines of "My cousin from my mother's side/ father's side" to explain the relationship. One key challenge is I was faced with some words that are considered as taboo in culture. AlSanousi wrote a paragraph describing the mating of two camels and how the character Salehah seemed to remember her first time sexual experience with her husband by staring at these camels. I was hesitant at first and was not sure how to translate it. But I overcame this challenge by translating the words in a scientific sense. For example, I translated: "فرجها" as "genitalia" and "مؤخرتها" as "buttock". Domestication came in handy when I

wanted to translate words that would be better off as transparent, for example: "الغتره و العقال" I chose to domesticate and translate it as "traditional headdress" and the reason for my choice is that all nationalities are familiar with the men's Arabian headdress, therefore I did not want to over complicate things. Another thing that I found better off to be domesticated was: "بالرمت و العرفج ،" "بالرمت و العرفج و الثمام و كل نباتات الربيع" all of these are considered plants of the spring, and all the have an English Scientific term, but no one is familiar with those terms because they are scientific, and these plants are not found in other regions, only deserts. And to understand the name of these plants you would have to be a botanist (plant scientist). So, the way I chose to translate the plants is: "flowers of the spring". If I had named these plants one by one, it would've sounded tacky and boring to the reader. Now in the other hand foreignization came in handy for words I could not find an equivalent for, so what I did is foreignize it and then add a foot note explaining what it is. For example: "البو" I translated it as "A baw", lucky for me the text already came explaining that term, so I translated it and then translated the explanation; "Baw is the skin of the calf filled with straw, wool, and leaves. Then they would take the Baw and leave it next to the mother so she can sniff it and be assured that her little one is still there. This process is used so that the mother would keep on lactating." A challenge I found interesting was unfamiliar animal names. For example: "الصردي الرمادي" which is a bird, and the equivalence is "great grey shrike". I chose to use the equivalence because if I translated it into just (grey bird) it would lose its beauty. A word that I was excited to know that there is an equivalence for is: "الربابة" which is a Middle eastern string instrument, the equivalence for it is "rebab". I considered translating it to (traditional string instrument) but again it would lose its beauty. The most challenging word of all was: "الناقة الخلوج" and the reason for that is first English language users are usually westerns, and westerns do not really use camels to get around in the past, but Arabs were known to that. There for Arabs have many terms that describe camels. And "الناقة الخلوج" means a female camel that has lost its calf (death). The most suitable translation that I found was "grieving camel" because according to the text camels have similar feeling and behaviors as humans. So as a human when you lose someone to death you grieve. Another reason for my choice on the word 'grieving' is because the camel usually produces sounds like groaning and grunting when it loses its calf.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, to me and many others this is an indeed iconic piece of literature. And I chose to translate it because there are many cultural and local references in it. Even though it talks about a time before oil, it is still relatable. For example, still a lot of people in Kuwait suffer from their family's disapproval when it comes to marriage, and I think that this book sheds light on this topic but in a different era. Saud AlSanousi did a great job with the point of view of the characters and with choosing the perfect terminology for that era. Literature books are always fun to translate but it can be difficult to capture the beauty from its original source text. That is why I chose a literary text to translate, it is nice to be up for a challenge. And yes, I was faced with many challenges when translating which included words with no equivalence or taboo/frowned upon words. But I took upon Venuti's Domestication and foreignization because it is what is best suitable for this text. As said before it is important to me that I capture the beauty of the source text, and I did not want to change much.

Glossary

No.	Term	Translation
1	ناقة الخُلاج	Grieving Camel
2	السيول	Torrents
3	الربابة	Rebab
4	الثغاء	Bleating
5	الشبقات	Sexually driven
6	الصرد الرمادي	Grey Shrike
7	الرمث والعرفج والعلندة والثمام	Spring Flowers
8	الدحل	Ditch
9	تجعجع	Grunting (camel sounds)
10	درداء	Toothless

Source Text



صالحه

قد أكذب لأخبركم الحقيقة، هذه هي الحقيقة.

بعيداً نُخَيِّم عن القبيلة كُنَّا؛ صالح وأنا وولدي،
نتحقَّق من وصول الشُّيول إلى الشُّعاب بعد أيامٍ
مطيرة، لنعود ونخبر القبيلة قبل هلال عيد
الأضحى. لا زرع في الأرض، ولا مياه في الشُّعاب
بعد، تأخرت هذا العام، لعلَّها تصل في الغد.

كنتُ أُجَدِّل شعري، لا أفهم سبباً لحنقي إزاء
ما بدرَ من صالح، قبل سويعاتٍ أمام صدوع
الأرض الغائرة. كان ساهماً ينظرُ إلى أرضٍ
يدريني أُحِبُّها، وأُحِبُّ المكوث فيها كُلَّ ربيعٍ
بسببِ الخُضرة والماءِ فيها. ابتسم:

"ديار صالحه".

لم يبدُر مني ما يُبديني سعيدة بالتسمية.
"أي نعم أحب هذا المكان، ولكنني لستُ
جديرةً بأن يحمل اسمي".
تنهَّد صالح. أعرَض عني:
"ديارٌ عذبةُ الماء..".
سارَ يبتعدُ مُنهيًا حديثه:
".. ديارٌ صالحَةٌ للعيشِ أعني".

انسلتُ إلى خيمتي الصَّغيرة أستغربُ شعورًا
داهمني. لماذا شعرتُ بإهانة؟ ما كدتُ أفرغ من
الجديلةِ الثانية حتى سمعتُ نداءً وَضَحَى، ناقتي
البيضاء الأثيرة، يُسمونها في القبيلة ناقةً صالحه
لشدة التصاقنا ببعض. ويُسمونني صالحه "بنت
أبوها" لأن ليس لأبي من الأبناء غيري، رغمَ
زيجاته الكثيرة، فكنت ابنته وولده في الوقتِ
نفسه.

كان صالح قد أناخها وربط قوائمها وعصبَ
عينها قبل أن يأخذَ حُوارها الذي أتمَّ عامه

الأول، من أجل أن يسمَ عنقه بوسم ملكية
القبيلة. ألفتُ وَضَحَى، معصوبة العينين،
تُجَعِّع وتُمَرِّغ رأسها بالتراب، تتفقّد رائحة
ولدها. ركضتُ إلى صالح المقعي فوق الحُوار
المطروح أرضاً مُكَبَّل القوائم. ولدي الصَّغِيرُ
يقفُ إلى جوارِ صالح مبجلق العينين فاغر الفم
يسيلُ منه اللعاب. هُو يُحِبُّ الحُوارَ بقدرِ محبَّتي
للنَّاقَةِ الأُم. أطبقتُ قبضتي على ذراعِ زوجي قبل
أن يلامسَ السَّيخُ الملتهب عُنُقَ الحُوار. التفتَ
إليَّ مُستغرباً استنكاري فعلاً اعتيادياً. حملتُ
صغيري منفرج السَّاقين علىِ خاصرتي، فالتفتُ
إلى أبيه أتوسَّله ألاَّ يفعل، فلا أحد يسمُ الإبل في
هذه السَّن.

"ماذا بك؟"، قال غاضباً على دأبه.

"عندي وكْد"، قلتُ له.

تفهَّم صالح وهو المولعُ بالولد، وقد قُمتُ
بالفِعْلِ نفسه، يومَ بلغَ صغيري عامه الأول قبلَ

شهور، لحظةً أطبقتُ قبضتي على معصمِ عجوز
القبيلة؛ أم دَحَام، وهي تُمسك بأصابعها
المرتعشة شفرةً حادَّةً جاءت بها من أجل ختان
الولد، ذلك الذي لا أظنُّه سوف يتمُّ أبدًا. فليكبُر
ويتخلَّص هو من قُلْفَتِهِ إن شاء ذلك. لم يُعجب
العجوز تصرُّفي. بحلقت في بعينين ضيقتين في
وجهٍ شبيهٍ بوجهِ العنز. قالت بصوتٍ يُشبه
المأماة:

"تعاندين أمر الله يا بنت! روح الولدِ أغلى من
قُلْفَتِهِ".

استنكرت النساءُ عنادي. حدَّرت أم دَحَام
وهي تُشيرُ إلى الولدِ بسبابيتها فاغرةً فمها الخالي
من الأسنان:

"إن عاش بقُلْفَتِهِ؛ يعيشُ ملعونًا.. إن عاش".
عبستُ وحملتُ الولدَ ولذتُ بخيمتي، فهو
ملعونٌ مُدَّ كان في بطني، ولعنةٌ فوق لعنةٍ تُعجِّلان
في الخلاص. أودعته فراشه وجلستُ إلى جواره

أضْمُ رِكْبَتِي إِلَى صَدْرِي، أَسْنَدْتُ إِلَيْهِمَا جَبِينِي
وَأَطْبَقْتُ أُذُنِي بِكَفِّي لئَلَّا أَسْمَعَ صَرَخَاتِ الْعَجُوزِ
الْغَاضِبَةِ، وَهِيَ تَصْفِنِي عَلَى دَابِّهَا بِالْبِلَادَةِ
وَالْغَبَاءِ، وَكَلِمَاتِهَا الْمَخِيفَةَ عَنِ اللَّعْنَةِ وَالْحَيَاةِ
وَالْمَوْتِ. هُوَ سَبِيلِي الْوَحِيدَ لِلْفِرَارِ الَّذِي تَعْرِفَنِي
بِهِ الْقَبِيلَةُ مُذْ كُنْتُ طِفْلاً تَمَقُّتُ الْخَيْمَةَ مُغْرَمَةً
بِالْفَلَاةِ، أَلُوذُ بِخَيْمَتِي أَتَكْوَرُّ عَلَى ذَاتِي، وَقَدْ
ارْتَكَبْتُ حِمَاةً. تَتَنَادَى النُّسُوءُ فِي الْخَارِجِ:
"صَالِحَةُ بِنْتُ أَبِيهَا فِي الْخَيْمَةِ.. صَالِحَةُ بِنْتُ
أَبِيهَا فِي الْخَيْمَةِ"، وَيَتَشَرَّنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَبْحَثْنَ عَنْ
حَرِيْقٍ أَوْ دَابَّةٍ ذَبِيحَةٍ أَوْ ضَحِيَّةٍ خَلَفَتْهَا الصَّبِيَّةُ
الْغَبِيَّةَ وَرَاءَهَا، وَلَكِنَّهِنَّ لَمْ يَبْحَثْنَ فِي الْعِرَاءِ عَنْ
ضَحِيَّتِي تِلْكَ الظَّهِيْرَةَ، لِأَنَّهَا كَانَتْ تَنَامُ بِقُلْفَتِهَا
دَاخِلَ الْخَيْمَةِ مَلْعُونَةً إِلَى جَوَارِي.

أَفَلْتُ صَالِحَ السَّيْخِ الْأَحْمَرَ الْمَلْتَهَبِ عَلَى
الثَّرَابِ، فِي حِينِ رَحْتُ أَفْكَ رِبَاطِ قَوَائِمِ الْحُورِ
أَحْرَرُهُ، وَأَسِيرُ مَعَهُ صَوْبَ النَّاقَةِ الْأُمِّ الَّتِي حَلَّتْ

عُصَابَةٌ عَيْنِيهَا بِفَعْلٍ تَمْرِيخُ رَأْسَهَا بِالْتُرَابِ.
حَرَّرْتُهَا مِنْ رِبَاطِ قَوَائِمِهَا. نَهَضَتْ مِنْفَعْلَةٌ تَنْظُرُ
إِلَى صَغِيرِهَا، تَتَشَمَّمُهُ وَتَتَحَقَّقُ مِنْ سَلَامَتِهِ. تَقْدَمُ
إِلَيْنَا صَالِحٌ يَنْحِنِي عَلَى الْعُصَابَةِ يَرْفَعُهَا عَنْ
الْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ يَهْزُ رَأْسَهُ يَطْلُقُ زَفْرَةَ ارْتِيَاكِ لَمْ تُزَلْ
غَضَبِهِ:

"لو أنك لم تمنعيني!".

لَنْ يَفْلَتَ صَالِحٌ أَبَدًا مِنْ انْتِقَامِ النَّاقَةِ لَوْ أَنَّهَا
رَأَتْ فَعْلَهُ بِصَغِيرِهَا، وَحَمْدًا لِلَّهِ أَنِّي سَبَقْتَهُ قَبْلَ أَنْ
يَفْعَلَ. لِلْإِبِلِ طِبَاعٌ صَعْبَةٌ مِثْلَ حَيَاتِنَا. وَفِيَّةٌ إِنْ
أَحَبَّتْ، وَلَكِنهَا مَزَاجِيَّةٌ، وَتَغُورُ الْإِسَاءَةَ فِي قَلْبِهَا
وَلَا تُسَامِحُ مِنْ يَسِيءِ إِلَيْهَا. وَصَالِحٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ
يَعْرِفُ ذَلِكَ، فَلْأَحَدِ أَسْلَافِنَا قِصَّةٌ مُتَوَارِثَةٌ، حِينَ
أَسَاءَ لِبَعِيرِهِ صَعْبَ الْمَرَّاسِ، أَثْقَلَ عَلَيْهِ وَآذَاهُ فِي
مَأْكَلِهِ وَمَشْرَبِهِ بَعْدَمَا شَاخَ. تَرَبَّصَ لَهُ الْبَعِيرُ فِي
أَحَدِ أَسْفَارِهِ مَعَهُ وَحِيدًا بَعِيدًا مَقْطُوعًا عَنِ الْقَبِيلَةِ،
وَطَارَدَهُ حَتَّى هَرَبَ جَدُّنَا الْأَكْبَرَ إِلَى رَأْسِ تَلٍّ عَالٍ

في الصَّحراء. ظلَّ يُراقبُ البعيرَ الهائجَ في الأسفل
يتحرَّى لحظة هدايته أو غيابه بعد طول انتظار.
أضناه العطشُ في التَّلِّ الصَّخري، وقرَّرَ النُّزولَ في
اليوم الرَّابع. وافاه البعيرُ في الأسفل. عضَّه في
كتفه وبرك فوقه يهرسه.

عاد البعيرُ إلى مضارب القبيلة بعد أيام، ودماءُ
صاحبه على وَبَرِه الأبيض، في صدره وبين قائمته
الأماميتين. نحن من ذُرِّيَّةِ ذاك الرَّجل، ومنه
اتَّخذنا اسم فرع القبيلة؛ المهروس، وعليه صرْتُ
صالحة آل مهروس. أما ذاك البعير الذي أنهى
حياة جدنا فقد أسقطت النَّاسُ اسمه، وصارت
تُشير إليه باسم الهارس مُذ يوم ذبحه جزاء جُرمه.
هي سُلالة إبِلِ مجنونة، قيلَ إنها من أوبار البعيدة،
جنوب الصَّحراء، جمال أوبار التي تزواج
أسلافها مع جمال الجن في الماضي البعيد.

انحنت وضحى بعنقها إليّ، تمسحُ جسدي
برأسها ممتنةً وقتَ عدتُ لها بصغيرها. مررتُ

كفِّي أمّسّد وبرَ عُنُقِهَا أطمئنُّهَا. كان الوبرُ يعلّقُ
بين أصابعي وينتشرُ نَتَقًا في الهواء مثل بذور
الهندباء الطائرة وقتَ ينفُخُهَا الصَّغار. هو دأبها
كُلَّ ربيعٍ تتخلَّصُ من وبرٍ اخشوشن بفعل
الشمسِ والغبار، قبل أن ينمو ناعِمًا قبيل الشتاء،
كالغيم أبيض يعكسُ أشعةَ الشمسِ، يهبُّها مظهرًا
أكثرَ جاذبيةً أمامَ فحلِّها ساري في موسم البرد
والتزاوج.

اندسَّ الصَّغِيرُ بين قوائمها يُمصِّصُ ضرعها.
نظرتُ إليهما ساهمةً وقتَ غافلني الحليبُ وراحَ
يدُرُّ من صدري مُبلِّلاً ثوبي. جلستُ أرضًا ألقم
ثدي للصغير. أطلتُ النَّظْرَ إلى وَضْحِي. أحبَّتها
أم دَحَّام بعد أن أطلقَ عليها القومُ لقبَ ناقة
صالحة، تقول عسى أن يمنحها الله بركة ناقة
صالح النبي. أحبُّ أن أتأمل تفاصيلها؛ رشيقَةٌ
فاتنةٌ مُتماسكةُ السَّنام، صغيرةُ الرأسِ مُسطَّحةُ
الهامةِ طويلةُ الغاربِ، مبرومة الفخذين، بيضاء

مثل كُريات البَرَدِ فوق الطَّينِ الدَّاكِنِ في الشِّتَاءِ،
واسعة العينين طويلة الرُّموشِ على نحوِ مُدهشِ.
كُلُّ مَلْمَحٍ فيها يشي بأنها من سلالَةِ إبْلِ أصيلة؛
وَضَحَى سَليلة الهَارِسِ.

* * *

وُلِدَتْ وَضَحَى، قَبْلَ أَنْ تَدَهْمَنِي حِيضَتِي
الْأُولَى بِثَلَاثَةِ أَحْوَالٍ. أَحَبَّبْتُهَا لِأَنَّهَا تُشْبِهُنِي.
مَاتَتْ أُمِّي سَاعَةَ وِلَادَتِي. لَفِظَتْ نَفْسَهَا الْأَخِيرَ مَعَ
أُولَى شَهْقَاتِي، وَتَكَفَّلَتْ عَجُوزَ الْقَبِيلَةِ الدَّرْدَاءِ، أُمَّ
دَحَامَ، بِتَرْبِيَّتِي. تُجِيبُنِي إِشَارَةَ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ كُلَّمَا
سَأَلْتُ عَنْ أُمِّي:

"عند الله".

آمَنْتُ مُذْ صَغِيرِي أَنْ مَا يَصِيرُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ لَا يُدْرِكُ.
لَطَالَمَا تَمَنَيْتُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ لَوْ أَنِّي وُلِدْتُ قَبْلَ أَرْبَعَةِ
أَحْوَالٍ مِنْ يَوْمِ مَوْلِدِي، تَتَكَفَّلُ أُمُّ صَالِحِ زَوْجَةِ
عَمِّي بِالْأَمْرِ وَتُرْضِعُنِي، لِأَصْبَحْتُ وَصَالِحِ
أَخْوَيْنِ بِالرَّضَاعِ لَا تَصْحُحُ لَنَا زِيْجَةٌ، وَلِرَبِّمَا
حَظِيْتُ بِالزَّوْاجِ مِنْ دَخِيلِ ابْنِ خَالِي الَّذِي
أَحَبَبْتُ.

نَفَقَتْ أُمٌّ وَضَحَى، مِثْلَ أُمِّي، أَثْنَاءَ وِلَادَةِ بَكْرِهَا
أَيْضًا. أَتَذَكَّرُ كَيْفَ فُجِعَ أَبِي بِنَفْوَاقِ النَّاقَةِ الْأُمِّ،
وَكَنْتُ أَسْأَلُنِي إِنْ كَانَ قَدْ فُجِعَ بِمَوْتِ أُمِّي
بِالذَّرَجَةِ نَفْسِهَا وَهُوَ الَّذِي لَهُ مِنَ الزَّوْجَاتِ، فِي
أَقَلِّ الْحَالَاتِ، ثَلَاثٌ. مَا الَّذِي يُبْكِيهِ لِمَوْتِ نَاقَةٍ
وَهُوَ يَضْحَكُ، كُلَّ عِيدٍ، عِنْدَمَا يَجْبُرُنِي عَلَى نَحْرِ
شَاةٍ؟ يُمَسِّكُ بِيَمِينِي الَّتِي لَا أَجِيدُ اسْتِخْدَامَهَا،
يَطْبُقُ عَلَيَّ كَفِّي الْمَطْبُوقَةَ بِالسُّكَّانِ، يُلَقِّنُنِي:
بِسْمِ اللَّهِ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ. أَغْمِضُ عَيْنَيَّ وَخَوَارِ الذَّبَّيْحَةِ
يَخْتَرِقُ مَسْمَعِي وَرَفْسَاتِهَا تَهْزُجُ جَسَدِي. يَنْظُرُ أَبِي
إِلَيَّ يَخْتَضُّ مِنَ الضَّحِكِ عَلَى مَنْظَرِ ابْنَتِهِ الَّتِي
يُعَامِلُهَا مُعَامَلَةَ الذُّكُورِ، وَقَدْ نَسِيَتْ الْبُكَاءَ، فِي
فُورَةِ دُمُوعِهَا، وَصَارَتْ تُكْرِرُ.

كَانَتْ الْمَرَّةَ الْأُولَى الَّتِي أَرَى فِيهَا أَبِي بَاكِيًا
مِثْلَ طِفْلِ مُكْرِهِ عَلَى قَبُولِ أَمْرٍ لَا رَادَّ لَهُ، لَا يُخْفِي
دُمُوعَهُ وَهُوَ يِعَاوَنُ نَاقَتَهُ الْأَثِيرَةَ عَلَى الْوِلَادَةِ
الْأُولَى. كَانَ مُشَمَّرَ السَّاعِدَيْنِ يَدُسُّ كَفَّهُ فِي فَرْجِهَا

الرَّطِبِ وَقْتَ أَطَلَّتْ وَضَحَى بَلِيلَةً بِرَأْسِهَا
وَقَائِمَتِهَا الْأَمَامِيَّتِينَ. وَكَانَتْ الْأُمُّ تُجْعَعُ
وَتَرْفَسُ وَتُورَجُّ عُنُقَهَا وَتَبْعُرُ مَا فِي أَمْعَائِهَا، فِي
حِينَ يَسِيلُ الدَّمُّ مِنْ فَرْجِهَا وَهِيَ مُسْتَلْقِيَةٌ عَلَى
جَانِبِهَا الْأَيْمَنِ، مُسْتَسْلِمَةٌ لِأَبِي الَّذِي كَانَ يَدْرِي
أَنَّهَا تَنْفُقُ. لَمْ تَخْرُجْ وَضَحَى بِكَامِلِهَا بَعْدَ، بِالْكَادِ
خَرَجَتْ حَتَّى مَنَّصِفِهَا وَقْتَ أَزَالَ أَبِي الْغِشَاءَ
الَّذِي عَنْ وَجْهِهَا، وَرَاحَ يَنْفُخُ فِي مَنَخَرِهَا يُزِيلُ
الرَّوَاسِبَ الْعَالِقَةَ فِيهِمَا. أَحْكَمَ قَبْضَتِيهِ عَلَى
قَائِمَتِهَا الْأَمَامِيَّتِينَ يَجْرُّهَا خَارِجَ ظِلْمَةِ الْجَسَدِ
تَحْتَ أَشْعَةِ شَمْسِ الصَّحْرَاءِ. لَوَتْ النَّاقَةُ الْأُمَّ
عُنُقَهَا الطَّوِيلَةَ كَمَا لَوْ أَنَّهَا تَرَجُّو نَظْرَةً آخِرَةً إِلَى
بِكْرِهَا، ثُمَّ هَبَدَ رَأْسَهَا عَلَى التُّرَابِ مَبْتَلًا بِدُمُوعِهَا
وَزَبَدِ مِشْفَرِهَا.

جَرَّ أَبِي وَضَحَى كَالنَّافِقَةِ عَلَى التُّرَابِ، وَتَرَكَهَا
عِنْدَ رَأْسِ الْأُمِّ لَعَلَّهَا تَسْتَفِيقُ مِنْ أَجْلِ وَلِيدَتِهَا
الْأُولَى، لَمْ تَفُقْ. ارْتَعَشَتْ شَفْتَا أَبِي وَأَقْعَى أَمَامَ

النَّاقَةُ النَّافِقَةُ يُمَسِّكُ بِرَأْسِهَا وَيُسْنِدُ جَبِينَهُ إِلَى
هَامَتِهَا. كَزَّ عَلَى أَسْنَانِهِ يِرْتَعِشُ بَاكِيًا بِصَمْتٍ.

أَمْضِيَتْ أَسْبُوعًا أَرْضَعُ وَضَحَى، مِنْ لَبَنِ نَوْقِ
أُخْرِيَّاتٍ، قَبْلَ أَنْ يَسْمَعَ أَبِي أَنْ مِنْ بَيْنِ الْإِبِلِ الَّتِي
وَرِثَهَا دَخِيلٌ عَنْ أَبِيهِ نَاقَةً خَلُوجًا، مَاتَ عَنْهَا
حُورَاهَا، سَقُوطًا فِي دَخَلٍ عَمِيقٍ بَعْدَ أَسْبُوعٍ مِنْ
وِلَادَتِهِ. كَانَ مِنْ شَأْنِ الْبَوِّ أَنْ يَحْلَلَ الْمَشْكَلَ، يُمَلِّأُ
جِلْدَ الْحُورِ النَّافِقِ بِالْقَشِّ وَالصُّوفِ وَيُتْرَكَ إِلَى
جِوَارِ أُمَّه، تَشْمُهُ وَتَطْمِئِنُّ إِلَى وَجُودِهِ وَتَدْرُ
الْحَلِيبَ، وَلَكِنْ مِنْ لَهُ قُدْرَةٌ عَلَى جَلْبِ جِلْدِ
الْحُورِ لَصْنَعِ الْبَوِّ، وَالْحُورِ فِي عَقْرِ الدَّخْلِ!
أَرْسَلَ وَالِدِي صَالِحُ ابْنِ أَخِيهِ إِلَى ابْنِ خَالِي،
يَطْلُبُ النَّاقَةَ الْخَلُوجَ لِتَصِيرَ أُمَّالَ وَضَحَى.
فَرِحْتُ بَعَثُورِهِمْ عَلَى أُمَّ لِلْيَتِيمَةِ، وَفَرِحْتُ أَكْثَرَ
لِمَجِيئِهَا يَسُوقُهَا دَخِيلٌ.

فِي غُضُونِ نَصْفِ نَهَارٍ لَاحَتْ لَنَا فِي الْبَعِيدِ نَاقَةٌ
وَالِي جَانِبِهَا صَالِحٌ يَمْتَطِي بَعِيرَهُ وَدَخِيلٌ عَلَى

فَرَسِهِ. كان ابن خالي قد كَبُرَ حَوْلًا مُذْ رَأَيْتَهُ وَقْتَ
موت خالي في رحلة الحج وضياع قبره. بدا
ناضجًا على مشارف الرجولة. جاء يسوقُ ناقتهُ
الْخَلُوجَ التي ما جَفَّتْ أَدْمُعُهَا بعد. قِيلَ إِنَّهُمْ
يَفْتَقِدُونَهَا كُلَّ لَيْلَةٍ، وَيَعْثَرُونَ عَلَيْهَا صَوْبَ
الدَّخْلِ، تَبْرُكٌ عِنْدَ شَفِيرِهِ، وَتَنُوحٌ إِلَى جِوَارِهِ
تَنْتَظِرُ خُرُوجَ صَغِيرِهَا الَّذِي تَهَشَّمَتْ عِظَامُهُ فِي
القَاعِ. لَمْ أَتْرِكْ دَخِيلَ يَأْخُذُ وَضَحِيَّ وَحِيدًا
وطلبتُ من أبي الدَّهَابِ مَعَهُ إِلَى الدَّخْلِ القَرِيبِ.
رَفَضَ صَالِحٌ أَنْ أَذْهَبَ بِصَحْبَةِ ابْنِ خَالِي. رَفَضَ
أَبِي أَيْضًا. رُبَّمَا لِأَنَّهُ لَا يَرِيدُ لِي أَنْ أَشْهَدَ مَا سَوْفَ
يَتِمُّ فَعَلُهُ، وَلَكِنْ حَسَنِي، الشَّابَّةَ الحَسَنَاءَ، زَوْجَةَ
أَبِي الرَّابِعَةِ لَعِبْتَ دَوْرَ الوَسِيطِ لِمَعْرِفَتِهَا مَدَى
تَعَلُّقِي بِهِ وَضَحِيَّ مُذْ وِلادَتِهَا بِذَلِكَ الظَّرْفِ، وَأَنَا
الَّتِي تَكْفَلْتُ بِإِرْضَاعِهَا مِنْذُ لِحْظَةِ وِلادَتِهَا وَعَلَى
مِدَارِ أسْبُوعٍ: "صَالِحَةُ تَشُوفُ نَفْسَهَا فِي
وَضَحِيَّ"، قَالَتْ حَسَنِي لِأَبِي تُلِينُ قَلْبَهُ. وَافَقَ يَهْزُ

رأسه صامتًا في حين كان الشرُّ يتطاير من عيني
صالح.

في الصباح الموالي وافتني العجوزُ أم دَحَام
تنهاني عن الذهابِ صُحبة دخیل. أسندت باطن
كفِّها المرتعشة على رأسي:
"النَّهار طويل والشمس حامية".

عبستُ وأوليت لها وللخيامِ ظهري. سرْتُ
على مبعدة من ابن خالي الصَّموت وناقاة أبيه
النائحة، نُيِّمُّمٌ وجهينا شطرَ الدَّخْلِ. شدَّد عليَّ
دخیل ألا أقرب لئلا ألفت انتباه النَّاقاةِ إلى وجود
وَضَحَى وراءها. لم يكن ينظر إليَّ وهو يُحدِّثني.
كان يُطرق ويُطيل النظر إلى كَفِّي وقت يتكلم.
مضى في السَّير، وأنا أتبعهما وأرقبهما من بعيد،
دخیل والخَلُوج، وأنا ووضحَى نسير وراءهما
على مهل. أُحدِّق بابنِ خالي، رجلٌ في سنِّ
الصِّبَا، يُعلِّق مزودته على كتفه ويحمل ربابته
على ظهره، يمشي دونما التفاتٍ في فضاءٍ يخبره

كما يخبر راحة يده، في صحراءٍ يعرفُ كلُّ دروبها
إلا دربًا يؤدي إلى قبر أبيه.

يحنو دخيل على الناقة ويلاطفها ريثما تكفُّ
عن نواحها، يحدوها غناءً بصوتٍ تخشعُ له
البرية. وكما لو أن الأرض كانت قفرًا، لم تلتفت
الناقة الشكلى إلى الخضرة التي تمتدُّ إلى ما لا
نهاية حولها، وقد التحفت الأرض بالرمث
والعرفج والعلندة والثمام وكُلِّ نبات الربيع.
سارت طيلة الدرب ولم تقف لتعتلف شيئًا قط.
راحت تُسرع في المسير مُعاودةً البكاء ما إن
تعامت الشمس فوق رؤوسنا، فعرفتُ أن
الدَّخَلَ قد صارَ قريبًا، ثمَّ خبَّت الخلوَجُ تسبُّقُ
دخيل ونثار طين أخفافها وراءها. أَلقت بجسدها
تبركُ إلى جوار الدَّخَلَ، واستحالَ بكأؤها نواحا
وهي تميلُ بعُنُقها يمينًا وشمالًا مثل ثكلى نادبة.
التفت إليَّ دخيل يُشير أمرًا بعدم الاقتراب، ثمَّ
راح يُعالج الأمرَ بخبرة العارف. أخرج حبلًا

ووتدًا ملفوفًا بخرقةٍ جلديةٍ من مزودته. ألقى وراء الناقةٍ يربطُ قوائمها بإحكام، ثمَّ قام برفع ذيلها وحشر الوتد في مؤخرتها بقسوةٍ قاصدًا إيلاها بحبس الهواء في بطنها، يُذكِّرها بأوجاع الولادة، ثمَّ ربط ذيلها إلى إحدى قائمتيها الخلفيتين، فوق الوتد المحشور، كيلا تلفظهُ خارج جوفها. كنتُ أتوجَّعُ لوجعِ الناقةِ، ولكن ما وراء ذلك الوجع حياة أفضل للخلوجِ ووَضَحِيّ اليتيمة، وهذا ما أجمني. أخرج دخيل خرقه قماشٍ من مزودته وراح يُحكّم رباطه على منخريّ الناقة التي تميّزُ حوارها من رائحته، وتركها على حالها تلك إلى جوار الدّخلِ تُولول وتسحُّ أدمعها على التُّراب، لا تكفُّ عن تحريك عنقها مثل أفعى تناورُ عقربًا عند جُحره، تفتحُ فكّيها على اتّساعٍهما تُنادي حوارها. أقفل دخيل إلى حيث أجلسُ بعيدًا مع وَضَحِيّ. تربّع إلى جوارنا على الأرض الخضراء، دسَّ كفه في

مِزْوَدَتِهِ وَأَخْرَجَهَا مَبْسُوطَةً وَفِيهَا تَمْرَاتٌ ثَلَاثٌ.
لَمْ يُبْعِدْ عَيْنِيهِ عَنِ كَفِّي الْيُمْنِيِّ وَقَتَّ أَمْسَكْتُ
بِالْتَّمَرَتَيْنِ بِشِمَالِي.

"يَبْدُو أَنَّ فِي هَذِهِ الْمَزْوُودَةِ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ"، قُلْتُ لَهُ.
ابْتَسَمَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُجِيبَ:
"هِيَ بَيْتِي".

بِسَبَبِهِ، فِيمَا بَعْدَ، صَرْتُ أَحْمَلُ مَزْوُودَةً مِنْ
الْقِمَاشِ، أَشِيلُهَا مَعِيَ أَيْنَمَا حَلَلْتُ، أَضَعُ فِيهَا
مَكْحَلَتِي وَمَشْطِي الْخَشْبِيَّ وَطَحِينِ الْحِنَاءِ
وَالْحُلِّيَّ وَالْقَهْوَةَ الْمَرَّةَ وَالتَّمْرَ وَأَقْرَاصَ اللَّبَنِ
الْمَجْفُوفِ.

هَرَسْتُ تَمْرَةً بَعْدَ نَزْعِ نَوَاتِمَا مِنْ أَجْلِ وَضَحِي،
فَهِيَ غَيْرُ قَادِرَةٍ عَلَيَّ جَرَشِ النُّوَاةِ بَعْدَ، ثُمَّ التَّقْمْتُ
تَمْرَتِي أَنْظَرْتُ إِلَى دَخِيلِ شَارِدِ الدَّهْنِ مَعَ الْخَلُوجِ
الْبَعِيدَةِ تَصِيحُ عِنْدَ فُوْهَةِ الدَّحْلِ، وَيَتَرَدَّدُ صَدَى
صِيحَاتِهَا مَكْتُومًا. يَعْجِبُنِي فِي دَخِيلِ شَكْلِهِ، إِلَى
جَانِبِ مَعْرِفَتِهِ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ كَمَا لَوْ أَنَّهُ شَيْخٌ حَكِيمٌ

رغم أنه لم يجاوز الخامسة عشرة. لبس الغترة
والعقال في سن صغيرة. أحب فيه عينيه
الدعجاوين الكحيلتين تحت حاجبين معقودين
أبدًا. حاجبين مرسومين بعناية أحدهما يحمل أثر
جرح عمره خمس سنوات، ندبة في وجه دخيل
تذكرني بصالح، يوم تركها تذكارة لدخيل، خطأ
يخلو من الشعر يفرق الحاجب. أحب شاربه
النابت حديثًا، ناعمًا مثل زغب أفراخ الصرد
الرمادي، وجديلتيه الطويلتين اللتين تبران
جديلتي طولًا، وهما تتسللان من غترته المثبتة
بعقاله المائل يمينًا. صموت بعكس صالح
الثثار المتباهي بطولاته الوهمية. أحب فيه كل
شيء إلا صمته هذا، وميل عقاله، ونظره الذي لا
يصوبه إلى وجهي، يخفض بصره وقت أتحدث
إليه، ويطيل النظر إلى كفي.

أمسك دخيل بربابته بعدما صارت التمرة في
جوفه. وضعها بين ركبتيه وأغمض عينيه بعدما

استلّ زفيرًا طويلًا، ولكنني قبل أن يشدو بكلمة
سألته:

"من أين لك؟".

فتح عينيه ينظرُ إلى عينيّ على الرّبابة. لم يُطل
النظر إلى وجهي. لعلّها المرّة الأولى التي ينظر
فيها إلى عينيّ. أطرق ينظرُ إلى آتته:
"صنعتُها".

"بربّك؟!"، سألتُه.

مرّر أصابعه على ربابته:

"أعوادُ خشب وجلد حُوار وساق خيزران
وشعرات من ذيل فرس".

ابتسم من دون أن يرفع رأسه عن ربابته.

"تُعجبك؟".

كنتُ أحملقُ في وجهه في حين هو لا
يفعل.

"وضحى تُحبُّ صوتها إذا ما غنّيت
أنت".

انتشرت الحُمرة في وجهه، ولا أدري لِمَ
خجلتُ من الاعتراف بإعجابي بصوته. قطَّبَ
حاجبيه يُردِّدُ قولاً قديماً:

"يا بنت لا يعجبك صوت الربابة.. تراه جلد
حويِّر فوق عيدان".

أغمَضَ عينيه ثانيةً. مرَّ القوسَ على وترِ الربابة
الوحيد، ينثرُ لحنًا شجيًّا. يصدحُ بأهاتٍ حرَّى،
وكلماتٍ آسيةٍ تكشفُ لوعته على ضياعِ قبر أبيه.
يقول في أغنيته إنه لن يولي أمرَ حفرِ قبره للآخرين،
سوف يسبق الموتَ يومًا، يحفرُ قبره بيديه عندما
يشيخ، ثمَّ يحزُّ عنقه وهو مستلقٍ في جوفه. أثارت
الصُّورة فزعي وأعجبيني في الوقت ذاته، وهو يهزُّ
رأسه يُسافر في غنائِه. كادَ عقاله المائل أن يسقط
لولا أني أمسكتُ به أُعيد تثبيته على رأسه. فتحَ
عينيه يتلفَّتُ حوله، كما لو أنه قد عاد للتو من
مكان بعيد. ابتسم، ولم يُملِ العِقَالَ فخرًا على
دأبه، كأنه حينما يكون معي ينسى من يكون.

سألته:

"هل أنت جادٌ في نية حفر القبر وحزِّ العُنُقِ؟".

ابتسم في غمامة حزنٍ على مُحيَّاه:

"أقولُ في غنائي ما لا أستطيع فعله".

تفكَّرتُ في أمرِ حَزِّ العُنُقِ، تبدو فكرة جيدة أن يختار المرء أوان موته. بدت الناقة المقيِّدة مُنزعة بعد سويعات، وقد نفخَ الهواءُ بطنها بفعلِ الوتد المحشور في مؤخرتها. صارت تتوجَّعُ وتُصدر أصواتَ وجعٍ غير نواحيها على فقيدها. نهَضَ دخيل من الأرضِ باسمًا وقد حُلَّت عُقدتا حاجبيه على غير عادة، يطلبني أن أتبعه بِ وَضَحِي ما إن يصلَ إلى الناقة ويشغلها عن النظر إلى الوراء. كنتُ أنظر له بدهشتي، كيف لهذا الفتى الذي يكبرني بأربعة أعوامٍ فقط أن يعرف كُلَّ شيءٍ عن كُلِّ شيءٍ؟ تعلمتُ منه الأشياء والأسماء، أسماء الرِّيح والزرع والنجوم، ولو أنه مكثَ في الديار مُدَّة أطول؛

لَخَبَرْتُ عِلْمَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مَا لَمْ يَكُنْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.
أشار لي برأسه أن أجيء وهو ممسكٌ برأسِ
الخلوجِ يمنعُ التفاتها إلينا أنا ووضحي. رمى إليَّ
حبلًا أطوَّق به قوائمِ ناقتي الصَّغيرة، وأمرني أن
ألقيها على جانبها وراءِ الخلوجِ كما لو أنها قد
وُلِدَت للتو. التقفتُ الحبلَ مُتلكئةً أنقلُ بصري
بينه وبين ناقتي الصَّغيرة التي جزعت وصارت
تبتعد مُرتابة. صاح بي:

"لا تُفكِّري!"

نظرتُ إليه كالبلهاء. أردف:

"التفكير تأخير".

أسرعتُ بطرحِ وضحي أرضًا وأقعيتُ فوقها،
وما طرحتُ كلمته عن ذاكرتي قط: لا تُفكِّري.. لا
تُفكِّري.. التفكير تأخير. كان دخيل يرمقني واسع
الابتسامة وأنا أطوَّق قوائمِ وضحي بذراعيَّ
وأطرحها أرضًا. ما زلتُ كما خبرني صالحة طارحة
النُّوق، لن يشقَّ عليَّ طرحِ وضحي حديثه الولادة.

ولما بدا أن أوجاع النَّاقَةِ الخَلُوجِ قد بلغت
مبلغًا لا يحتملُه صبرها، سحبَ دخيلٌ وَضَحَى
الطَّرِيحَةَ من وراء الخَلُوجِ، كما لو أنها وُلِدَت
للتَّوِّ، وتركها بقيودِها أمامَ النَّاقَةِ لسويعاتٍ أُخرى
أَمْضِيْنَاهَا في المراقبة من البعيد. دخيلٌ يُراقبهما،
وأنا أراقبه وهو ينظرُ إليهما مُخزَّرًا عينيه. بدت
النَّاقَةُ غيرَ واثقةٍ في البدء، تُحاول أن تتشمَّم
وَضَحَى تتعرَّفَ إليها، ولكن خرقة القماش كانت
مُحكِّمة الرِّبْطِ على منخريها. راحت تنظرُ إلى
الصَّغِيرَةِ بغير مشاعر تتفحَّصها. حملَ دخيلٌ
رَبابته وأغمضَ عينيه يشدو بأغنية أُخرى. هدأت
الخَلُوجُ أخيرًا رغم أن الوجد ما زال في مؤخرتها.
تقدَّم دخيلٌ صوبَ وَضَحَى الرَّابِضَةِ على جانبها
أمامَ النَّاقَةِ بلا حراك، وكأنه ينوي إيذاءها، يحثو
عليها التُّرابَ ويصدرُ أصواتًا مجنونة ويحرِّك
يديه كما لو أنه يؤذيها، ولما راحت وَضَحَى
تُرغِي من الخوف انتفضت النَّاقَةُ تُجمع

غاضبةٌ تُحاول النهوض والذود عن الصغيرة،
ولكنها أخفقت بسبب قيود قوائِمها فازدادت
جمععتها. فرح دخيل لرد فعلها وتجاوبها،
وأثابها بتحريرها وفك الرباط من منخريها
وإخراج الوتد من مؤخرتها، في حين كنت أحررُ
اليتيمة المدعورة. وما إن استقامت الاثنان حتى
أخفضت الناقة رأسها ثمسّد جسد وضحى.
وفيما كان دخيل يضحك لنجاح عمله كنتُ أبكي
إزاء مشهد وضحائي وهي تلوذُ بين قوائم أمها
الجديدة ترضعُ من ضرعها. ما عرفتُ لبكائي
سبباً بين حُبورٍ وشعورٍ بالتخلي. تملكنتني غيرة
شديدة من الناقة الخلوج، كيف تجرؤ؟ ماذا لو
أني أخذتُ صغيرها قبل سقوطه في الدحل؟ كيف
تشرعُ؟ بدد دخيل أفكاره وقتما أخرج وعاءً من
مزودته ومدّه إليّ يبتسم. انحنيت تحت الناقة إلى
جوار وضحى أشخبُ حليبها. ملأتُ الوعاء.
رفض الشرب قبل أن أفعل. طاب لي طعمُ

الحليب المنكّه بزهور الربيع التي اعتلفتها النّاقة.
مددتُ الوعاءَ إلى دخيل. شربَ قبل أن يضحك
وهو يُعيده إليّ بكلتا يديه، من دون أن يرفع
رأسه، ورغوة الحليب تُغطي شفته العليا وشاربه
النّابت:

"صرتُ تُجيدين الحلب أخيراً!!".

أدار لي ظهره وقت التهمني خجلٌ غير
مألوف. نفضتُ رأسي أطرُدُ ذكري سنواتٍ ستّ
مضت، يومَ أمسك بساعدي أوّل مرّة في مرعى
الشيّاه الغبية.

"لا تذكري، كنت طفلة"، قلت له.

دوّت ضحكته في الفضاء، وأنا أنظرُ إليه من
وراء ظهره ساهمة. يهتزُّ كتفاه من شدّة الضحك.
كنتُ سأغضب لو أني لم أغرم به، أو أني لم أكن
غبيّة ذات يوم يستدعي ضحك دخيل اليوم. كنت
سأصرخ به أن يكفَّ سخريته لو لم يكن صوته
مدعاةً رعشةً في قلبي.

سرنا إلى القبيلة من دون أن تلتفت الناقة وراءها
إلى الدَّخْل، وكنتُ أخشى ساعة رحيل دخيل إلى
قبيلته مع الناقة ووضحي، لأن اليتيمة للخروج:
"ألا ترك الناقة؟".

"يهون عليّ ذبحها لو راحت لغيري"، ردّ في
الحال.

تسارع وجيبٌ قلبي ولم أفه بكلمة. دخيل
يُحِبُّني، آمنتُ بحدسي.

كانت فرحة أبي كبيرة لما لحنا له في البعيد؛
دخيل وأنا ووراءنا الناقة تسيرُ جنبًا إلى جنب مع
اليتيمة التي ما عادت. رحل دخيل، مُتنازلاً عن
الخروج لليتيمة، وترك كليهما لي. عاد إلى قبيلته
وحيداً يحملُ ربابته على ظهره، وأنا مُذ يوم
الدَّخْل ما فتئتُ أفكّر في قوله عن ذبح الناقة لو
راحت لغيره.

مُذ ذاك اليوم وابن عمّي يُعادي ابن خالي
علانية. غادر دخيل على ظهر فرسه إلى الغرب

ساعة الغروب. ولم أره بعدها ولا لِمَامًا. نسيْتُ
كُلَّ كلماته القليلة، وبقيت بضع كلماتٍ ما نسيْتُها
مُنذ يومِ الدَّخْلِ ذاك، لحظةً ودَّعني مُطَرِّقًا يُطيل
النظرَ إلى كَفِّي على دأبه. لم يرفع رأسه وهو
يُحدثني بأشأفاً فاكًا عُقدة حاجبيه. يقولُ إنه كشفَ
سرَّ اختلافِ نقوشِ الحِنَاءِ بين كَفِّي. أطلتُ
النظرَ إليه صامتةً علَّه ينظرُ إلى عيني. لم يفعل.
استطرد بأنه يسمع زوجة خالي، أمّه، تكيّلُ
المدائح إلى إتقاني النّقش. أبرع ناقِشة حِنَاءِ في
القبيلة. كلُّ العرائس يجلسنَ أرضًا، أمام الطفلة
ناقِشة الحِنَاءِ، يبسطنَ لها كفوفهنَّ قبل ليلة
الزَّفاف، تنقشُ لهنَّ بتلاتِ أزهارٍ وأوراقِ نباتٍ
ونجومًا.

"أنتِ عسراء"، قال وهو لا يزال ينظرُ إلى
كفِّي.

لم أجبه. ظننتُ خائبةً أن صمتي سوف يدفعه
للنظرِ إلى وجهي. لم يفعل. أردفَ:

"أنتِ لا تُجيدين صنْعَ شيءٍ بيدك اليمنى،
نقشتها بالحِناءِ تلكِ النقوشَ الباهرة، وتركتِ
كفِّكَ اليسرى لفتاةٍ أُخرى تنقشُها هذا النقشَ
الرّديءَ".

لا أخطئُ حينما أقولُ إنه يعرفُ كلَّ شيءٍ
عن كلِّ شيءٍ. كان على صواب، أنا لا أُجيدُ
شيئاً بيدي اليمنى إلا الذّبح، مُدِّ علمني أبي،
مثل الأولاد، ذبح الخرافِ صبيحة عيد
الأضحى. لم أحر جواباً لـ دخيل أنتظرُ منه
التفاته، التفاته واحدة تلتقي فيها أعيننا طويلاً،
لكنه لم يفعل، كما لو أنني غير مرئية. عقْدَ
حاجبيه وابتسم. جمع الابتسامة وتقطية
الحاجب بشكلٍ لا يساعد على التكهّن بما سوف
يقول.

"أحبُّ نقشَ الحِناءِ في كفِّكَ اليمنى".
قالها قبل أن أسأله:
"هل نلتقي؟".

التفت إلى وَضَحَى يدريني مُغرمة بها:
"في عيون الإبل".

لم أفهمه، كما لا أفهم كثيرًا من قليل كلامه.
أولاني ظهره يسيرٌ نحو فرسه. حثتُ الخطو
أسبقه. وقفتُ أمامه:

"وفي غير عيون الإبل، هل نلتقي؟".

أجابني كأنه لم يُجب:

"العلم عند الله".

رحلَ بعد قولِ كلماتٍ أخيرة، لم يغرس بها
يأسًا في النَّفس، وهذا أمرٌ جيّد. ركبَ فرسه
وغادر، دونما غرسٍ بذرة أمل، وهذا أمرٌ سيء.
أطلقتُ بصري وراء دخيلٍ على فرسه. رفعتُ
رأسي إلى السَّماءِ الدَّكْناءِ وأنا أستعيدُ رجَع
إجابته الأخيرة. مارَت بي الأرضُ ودارت.
أغمضتُ عينيَّ على الشَّمسِ في أفولها، وفتحتهما
على وجه أم دَحَام الذي يُشبه أرضًا حفرت فيه
الشَّمسُ أخاديد الياس. سقتني ومسحت العرقَ

في جبيني، ثمَّ قَرَّبْتُ وجهها إلى وجهي وانفرجت
شفتاها الدَّقِيقَتان عن فمها الأذْرَد. وأنا أطفو بين
يقظة وإغماء، أبصر في وجهها صحراء يابسة
ودَحَلًا عميقًا يفوحُ منه ضوع الهالِ والقرنفل.
همست أم دَحَام بصوتها شبيه الثُّغَاء:
"ما فاد في الشَّمس عناد".

كنتُ أهذي. أتذكّرُ أشياء، وأشياء لا أتذكّرُها.
قلتُ لها وأنا أمسح بواقِي الماء من شفتي:
"دخيل يُحبُّ نقوش الحِنَاء في يميني".
صفعتني. بدَّدت هذياني. لم تُكن صفة
إيقاظ.. أو رُبَّمَا كانت. أولتني ظهرها زاجرة:
"غبية!".

اقترَبَ مني صالح ذاك النَّهار يُحدِّق في عيني.
يسألني ماذا دار بيني وبين دخيل قبل ركوبه
الفرس. لم أُخفِ حديثنا. أخبرته أني سألت ابن
خالي إن كُنَّا سنلتقي أم لا. سألتني صالح بنزق
من أدرك مشارف الرُّجولة:

"وهل تلتقيان؟".

أخبرته بإجابة دخيل المقيمة. إجابة عالقة بين
سماءٍ وأرض. خَزَرَ صالح عينيه ينظرُ إلى
السَّماءِ، ثُمَّ هبَطَ بنظرِهِ يُملِيه في عينيَّ حتى كُسِرَ
شيءٌ في داخلِهِ. لا أدري ما الذي رآه، وهل أبصرَ
فيهما الحُبَّ، وهل لي أن أدركَ الحُبَّ وأنا طفلةٌ
لم أبلغ حيضتي الأولى بعد؟ لا أدري شيئاً، ولا
أتذكّر إلا نظرة صالح ذاك النهار، وقتَ أغمضها
عن عينيَّ، وفتحها على غربٍ اختفت فيه
فَرَسُ دخيل. الغرب الذي جاء بِـ فالح بعد
ثلاث سنواتٍ غاضباً يتوعّد دخيل بالقتل،
ردّدَ أبيات غزلٍ بي وهجاءً لأبيه شيخ القبيلة،
عمّي أبي صالح، كان فالح قد سمع البعض
يتداولها نقلاً عن دخيل قبل أن يُرسل أمّه تطلبني
للزواج:

"فعلها الخسيس ولم يُراعِ صلة دم!".

كان هجاءه لعمّي قاسياً، ولكن أبيات

غزله كانت من قلبٍ ولهان، أنستني كُلَّ شيءٍ إلا
غرابة الفعل؛ لِمَ يهجو عمِّي ثُمَّ يُرسل أمَّه تطلبُ
يدي؟

أُنهيتُ إرضاع الصَّغير الغافي بين يدي، وقتَ
راحت وَضَحَى وساري وصغيرهما يعتلفون من
نتفِ خير الرِّبيع. في كُلِّ مرَّةٍ أنظرُ إلى الثلاثة في
الموضع الأثير، عند الشَّعاب، كنتُ أتَحَسَّرُ في
نفسي، وأتخيلني ودخيل وصغيرنا نعم بخيرات
أطيب المواسم وأكثرها بركة في محلِّ الإقامة
الذي أُحِبُّ، قبل أن نُقْفَلَ إلى خيمتنا، أتربَّعُ في
أحد أركانها أنصتُ إلى غنائه على الرِّبابة.

لا أشكُّ للحظة أن للإبل عقلاً كما عقل
البشر، فهي تُدهشني بذكائها، يكفي المرءُ نظراً
إلى عينيها، بين أهدابها الطويلة الكثَّة، ليُدرك ما
يقوله هذا المخلوق صمّاً يمنحه مهابة، بعكس
الشَّيْء الغبية. قيلَ إن الجِمال خُلِقَتْ شأن الجِنِّ
والشياطين من نار، أكَّدَ النَّبِيُّ ذلك في دعوته إلى

النظر في عيونها وهبابها إذا ما نقرت. أنا أحب
عيونها، ولكني لا أبصر فيها إلا الموت. صرت
أهيم فيها مُد رهن دخيل لقاءنا المقبل في عيون
الإبل.

لو أن للإبل لسانًا ناطقًا، لسألت وضحى عن
ساري، أتراها تُحبّه؟ أم أنها مجبورة أن تحتمل
من أجل صغيرهما؟ وهل يستحق الصغير
صبرها؟ ماذا لو أن صغيرها ليس من صلب
ساري؟ ألم تجفل من زوجها في لقاءهما الأول
قبل حولين؟ كان شتاءً قارسًا، وكان من الخطورة
الاقتراب من ساري في فورة هيجانه واشتهائه
لأنثى. يرقص حول نفسه مُختالًا، يُطلق من فمه
ريحا أكثر زَنخًا من جحر ظربان، يجذبُ إليه
الإناث الشَّبقات.

كنتُ أنظر إليه محتجبةً بخيمتي، يختالُ
بفحولته ينثرُ بوله بتحريك ذيله ويرغي ويزبد
ويكزُّ على أسنانه. لم أنتبه قط إلى جنون ذكور

الإبل قبل زواجي، ولكنني بعد الزواج صرتُ
أولي أمرها اهتمامًا، أراقبها لعلّي عند فهمها أفهم
صالحًا.

في ذاك الشتاء، بدت وَضَحِي مُسْتَثَارَةً شَبِيقَةً
على نحوِ نَهْمٍ. بَرَكْتَ على الأرض بين نباتات
المطر، تتمرَّغُ بالتراب، تُباعِد ما بين ساقِها
الخلفيتين، تتبول وتُحرِّك ذيلها كاشفةً عما يرومه
الفحلُّ الثائر. كنتُ أرى فيهما ليلتي الأولى مع
صالح في خيمة الزوجية. أتذكر الوجد سَكِينًا
تغوص في أحشائي، ولزوجة عرقه على ظهري،
وريح أنفاسه الحارّة وراء أذني. لا شيء غير
لحظاتٍ موجهة أنتظر انتهاءها قبل ارتفاع شخير
صالح. لم أدرك يومًا ما تحكي عنه النساءُ من لذةٍ
يرتعش لها الجسد، ولم أفلح في تعلُّم دروسِ
حَسْنِي حول الفراش قبيل ليلتي الأولى. حَسْنِي
المغناج شيطانة الفراش، مُلْهِمة نساء القبيلة،
تُلَقِّنهنَّ أصول المضاجعة، وتُخرسهنَّ وقتَ

يبدأ حديثاً عن أسرار ليلاهنّ وتفاصيلها. أحبُّ
في حَسْنِي صمتها عن التفصيل، لأنها لا تكشفُ
لي أبي في صورةٍ لا أحبُّها.

أتذكر كيف اقترب ساري من وَضَحِي الرابضةِ
ذاك الشَّتاء. يُحرِّك ذيله وتظهر من تحته خصيته
الضَّخمتان، واحدةٌ تكبرُ الأخرى. برَكَ بثقله
فوقها، يعضُّ على عُنُقِها مثل صالح تماماً. يعلو
ويهبط في حين لا قُدرةَ للناقة على فعلِ شيءٍ عدا
الرُّغاء بصوتٍ عال. صوت اللدّة التي لا أعرفها،
أو الألم الذي كنتُ أكتُمُ صوته وأنا أعضُّ باطنَ
ساعدي، حتى استحالت آثارُ أسناني مثل وُشومِ
الإبل في يدي. هل كنتُ آثمةً بإقحامِ دخيل في
خيالاتي؟ يُلاطفني، ويحنو عليّ مثل ربابته خشية
انقطاع وترها الوحيد. وحدها أم دَحَام تدري
بآثامِ خيالي. تلومني على عدم نقشِ كَفِّي نكايَةً
بصالح وفاءٍ لِـ دخيل. أُحدِّق في عينيها أُجيب:

"ما نقشتها يوم عرسي".

تُفَلت ضحكة تهكِّم من أنفها:
"غداً تُرزقين بمولود يُنسبك".
أكرُّ على أسناني أُجيبها:
"أذبحه!".

تلومني العجوزُ على تعلُّقي بأمسٍ دخيل من
دون أن تُسميه، تهزُّ رأسها آسفة وهي تقول إن من
يشيل الأمس على ظهره، تغوصُ قدماه في اليوم،
ولا يُدرك الغد. لكن، ما جدوى إدراك غدٍ يخلو
من دخيل؟

صالح لا يقسو عليَّ إلا بعدما يملأ عينيه من
عيني، يُشاهد فيهما خصيمه، ولسوء الحظ، هو
طيلة الوقت يفعل! كان يُلاطفني وقت يحسبني
نائمة، وكثيراً ما كنتُ أفعلُ النومَ لعلِّي أفهمه.
أشعرُ بأنفاسه مُتهدِّجةً قريبةً إلى وجهي.
أستشعره في ظلام الليالي المقمرة، يُطيل النظر في
ملامحي يستنطقها. يُمرّر طرف إصبعه بلينٍ على

شفتي ينثرُ فيهما الخدر. يُمسد على شعري برفق.
يُلامس جسدي بكفِّ حانية لا أعرفها ساعاتِ
النَّهار. تتسارع أنفاسه ويغمغم في حزن. وإذا ما
انتبه إلى صَّحوي صدَّ عني بوجهٍ ساخط. صالح
يُحبُّني ولا يرغبُ بأذيتي، ولا دافع لقسوته معي
إلا جبر كسره بكسرٍ نده في نفسي. ذاك الندُّ الذي
يُبصره في عيني، مُنذ ليلتنا الأولى في خيمة
الزوجية، وقتَ خابَ رجاؤه بنيلِ قطراتِ دمٍ
تتوجُّ ليلة الزفاف.

جثا عند فرجة الخيمة يضمُّ رأسه بين يديه:
"لم يُراعِ حُرمة"، قال بحسرة. هو يدري أني لم
أقابل دخيل مُذ يوم الدَّحل قبل سنواتٍ ثلاث،
ويدري أن شيئًا بيني وبين ابن خالي لم يحدث،
ولكن الشك قد وافق ضعفه، وكنت خرساء عن
دفعِ التُّهمة أتعمدُ إيذاءه.

كان يضربُ الأرضَ بقدمه، ويدور حول نفسه
مثلٍ بغيرِ عاثِ القُراد فسادًا في وبره، وأنا أُحملق

فيه تطيبٌ لي أتأته لولا أن داهمتني كلمات
دخيل: "يهون عليّ ذبحها لو راحت إلى غيري".
خلته يذبحني، يجُرني من شعري إلى خارج
الخيمة، ينحرفني أو يرميني ببندقيته، ولكن شيئاً
من ذلك لم يحدث. اكتفى يُحملك في عيني ملياً
وقت يُعاشرني قاصداً إيدائي.

ادخلتُ ولدي فراشه، وأعددتُ الطَّعام
لِصالح الذي لم يأكل من اللحمِ المقدَّدِ والرُّزِّ
والكمأ إلا لُقمتين. لا يُعجبه صنيعي أبداً. نفَضَ
يده الملطَّخة بالسَّمَن يزجُرني: "بحر!". تذوقتُ
الطَّعام، لم أجدهُ مالِحاً كما يدَّعي، وهو الذي لا
يعرفُ البحرَ إلا في آياتِ القرآن، وأحاديث
أصحاب القوافل العائدة من مُدن الخليج، حول
ماءٍ أجاجٍ أزرق، لا قُدرة لغير الإبل على شُرْبِهِ.
أقعى صالح تحتَ وَضْحَى يشخبُ حليبها
وقتَ تناهى إلى أسماعنا هميس أخفافٍ مُسرعة.
جاء فالح على ظهر ناقته السَّبوق يزفُّ البشارة

إلى شقيقه الأكبر؛ قال إن قوَّات أمير الكويت
وحلفائه يُبلون بلاءً حسنًا متغلغلين في مُدُن نجد،
وإنهم قد استولوا على الزَّلفي وبريدة وعنيزة، في
حين سلَّمت الرِّياض لابن سعود من دون قتال.
عقد فالح حاجبيه وهو يلتفتُ إليَّ نصفَ التفاتٍ
قبل أن يستأنف حديثه لِـ صالح:

"جاءنا رسول بن صباح يطلبك بالاسم على
رأس الهجَّانة لمعركةٍ وشيكة".

انحنى فالح من فوق ناقته يوشوشُ لِـ صالح.
داهمني قلقٌ إزاء نظرات الاثنين إليَّ.

أطلقت ناقهً فالح سيقانها للريح في حين طوَّقنا
الصَّمتُ أنا وصالح، ينظرُ واحدنا إلى الآخر. دخل
الخيمة يحملُ بندقيته الإنكليزية ومضى صوب
ساري يُبركه ويُجهِّزه للرَّحيل. سألت صالحًا:
"بماذا همس أخوك؟".

لم يلتفت إليَّ وهو مُقعٍ يُثبِّت الرَّحْلَ على
بعيره. أجاب:

"رجال ابن صباح يتأهبون لملاقاة ابن رشيد
في الصّريف".
أفلتُ شهقة:
"أخوالي!".

تبادرَ إلى ذهني دخيل، هل تُقاتل قبيلتي
قبيلته؟ وهل يُقاتل ابن عمّي ابن خالي؟! أدارَ
صالح وجهه ينظرُ إليّ من وراء كتفه.
"الخال خليّ والعم وليّ".

نهضَ وتقدّم إليّ يُخرج من نطاقه الجلدي
خنجره:

"الله يسامحك ولا يسامحه".
أمسكَ بكفّي. وضعَ فيها الخنجر وثني
أصابعي عليه وهو يُملي النَّظرَ في عيني:
"كنتُ أتوق لسفك دمك.. ولكن دمك، من
الأول، ما كان لي".

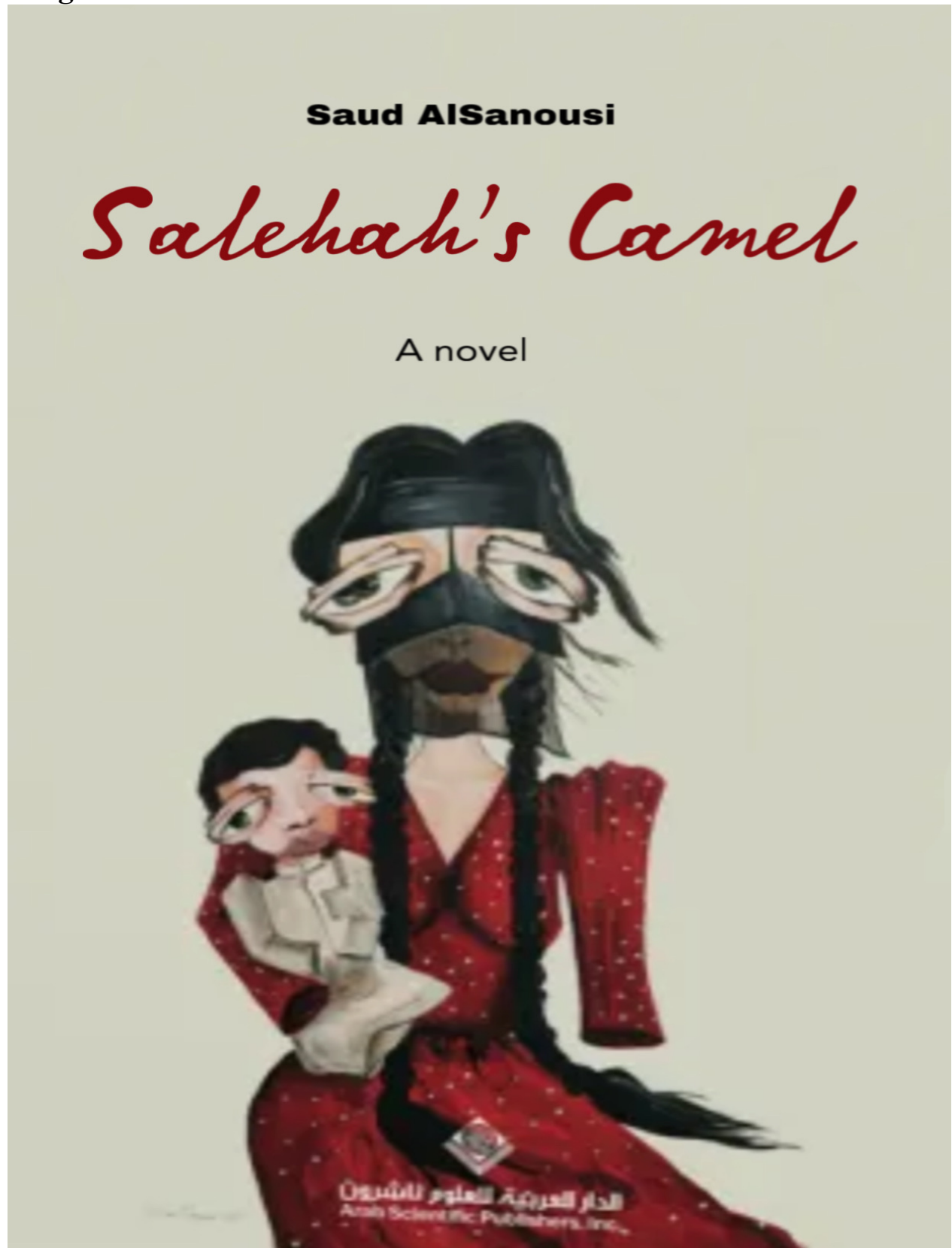
لم أفه بكلمةٍ وهو يحملُ صغيري يضمُّه إلى
صدره. وأنا أضمُّ خنجره إلى صدري. امتطى

ساري الذي نهض واستقام على قوائمه شامخاً،
كما لو أنه يدري بانضمامه إلى رؤوس صفوف
الهجّانة. أحكم صالح لفّ لثامه ثمّ صاح بي أمراً
ألا أبرح مكاني لحين عودته. صحتُ به:
"متى تعود؟".

لاذ بصمته وهو يتهاياً للعودة إلى القبيلة ليتزوّد
بالذخيرة. أطال النّظر إليّ من وراء لثامه بعينين
حمرأوين خضّلهما الدّمع. تهدّج صوته يكتّم
عبرةً مريرة. حدّق في عينيّ مليّاً قبل أن يُعيد إجابةً
أحفظها:

"العِلم عند الله".

Target text



Salehah

I might lie to tell you the truth, that is the truth.

Saleh, my child, and I camped away from our tribe to see if the torrents have reached the reefs after constant rainy days. We waited in order to go back and tell our tribe about it before the crescent that indicates the start of Eid al-Aldha. But the ground was dry and there was no water in the reefs. Perhaps it would reach us tomorrow.

I was braiding my hair thinking about the incident that occurred a few hours earlier in front of the sunken earth cracks, and why I got annoyed at Saleh. He was staring at a specific place in the desert knowing that I love it and love staying on it every spring because of its water and greenery. “Salehah’s home” he said smiling.

I was not happy with it being named after me.

“Yes, I love this place, but I’m not worthy of it having my name.”

Saleh sighed and turned his back on me:

“The home of fresh water..”

He walked away concluding.

“.. I meant homes good for living”¹

I slipped into my small tent, surprised by the feeling that struck me. Why did I feel insulted? As soon as I finished my second braid, I heard the call of Wadha, my favorite female white camel. Our tribe calls her Salehah’s camel because we are so attached to each other. They also call me Salehah “daddy’s girl” because my father has no other children but me. I was his daughter and son at the same time.

Saleh held her down, tied her legs, and blindfolded her before taking her calf that had just turned one to heat brand it with the tribe’s mark. Wadha was left grunting and curling her head into the ground looking for little one’s scent. I ran to Saleh who was straddling the little calf that was tied down to the ground. My little boy stood next to Saleh with his eyes wide and his mouth agape, dripping saliva. My little boy loves that calf as much as I love the mother camel. I gripped my

¹ Salehah in Arabic means good and suitable. That is why when he named the place after her and she didn’t like it he quickly changed it where it seemed that he meant the place is good to live in.

husband's arm before the fiery iron wand touches the calf's neck. He turned to look at me with a shocked look on his face, wondering why I would refuse such a normal ritual. I carried my little boy on my waist and begged his father not to brand the calf. No one heat brands a calf at that age. "What's wrong with you?" he exclaimed angrily.

"I have a son." I said.

Saleh understood because he is very fond of our son. I did the same thing a couple months ago when my little boy turned one. I remember clasping the arm of the oldest lady of the tribe; Um Daham, as she held with her shaking hands a sharp razor to circumcise my boy, which I think will never happen. When he grows up, he could get rid of his foreskin himself if he wanted. The old lady did not like what I did. With a face similar to a goat, she looked at me and squinted her eyes. She told me with a voice like bleating:

"How dare you disobey god's orders little girl?! Your son's soul is far more important than his foreskin."

The other ladies disapproved my stubbornness. Um Daham pointed at my son and warned with her toothless old mouth:

"If he lived with his foreskin, his soul will be cursed... that is if he lived."

Frowning, I carried my son and went to my tent. My son was cursed ever since he was in my stomach, well a curse upon a curse will hurry us towards doom and I do not care. I set him down in his bassinet and sat next to him hugging my knees to my chest. I placed my forehead on my knees and plugged my ears with my fingers to shut out that old lady's angry screeches who described me as dull and stupid, as well as screaming some frightful words about damnation, life, and death. My only way of escaping is hiding in my tent, in fact I was known for it ever since I was a child. I always hid in my tent after doing something stupid, as the women outside would say: "daddy's girl is in the tent." And then they would look for a fire or a carcass or a victim that I left behind. But this time they did not search for anything, because my "victim" was sleeping inside my tent next to me with his foreskin still intact.

Saleh let go of the flaming hot iron wand and threw it on the sand. I went to untie the calf's limbs and walked him to his mother that undid her blindfold herself by rubbing her head on the ground. She got up in a hurry looking for her little one, sniffing him and checking for his safety. Saleh

came to us lifting the blindfold of the ground while shaking his head. He sighed in relief, but that sigh did not seem to relieve his anger:

“If you hadn’t stopped me!”

Saleh wouldn’t’ve escaped my camel’s revenge if she saw what he did to her calf. Thank God I beat him to it before he did anything stupid. Camels are very similar to us when it comes to their tempers. A camel is loyal if it loves, but is moody, and would hold the abuse in their heart and does not forgive those who have wronged them. Saleh knows better than this, since a similar story happened to one of our ancestors; where he abused his male camel and didn’t give him enough food and water even when it grew old. Then one day when they were traveling the camel ran away, our ancestor chased it until he reached a high hill and stared at the raging camel below. After a long wait on the rocky hill, he decided to go down to the camel on the fourth day. The camel met him halfway and bit him on his shoulder and sat on top of him smashing him into mush.

The camel returned to the tribe a few days later with its owner’s blood on its white fur, chest, and between its front legs. From that incident we took our tribe’s name Al Mahroos, thus my name being Salehah Al Mahroos.¹ People started referring to the camel that killed our grandfather to Hares after the incident². The breed of these camels is known for being crazy and ferocious, from the south of the desert, they’ve said that they have interbred with camels Jinns³ a long while ago and that is why they are that way.

Wadha lowered her neck and rubbed it against me grateful for bringing back her little one. I patted her wool covered neck to reassure her. Her lint was getting stuck in between my fingers then scattering away as the wind blows. It reminded me of how the dandelion seeds fly away when the kids blow on them. Because of the sun and dust her wool gets rough, so every spring she sheds all of it and it regrows back soft before winter. When it regrows, it reminds me of white clouds that reflect the sun’s rays, giving her a more attractive appearance right in time for mating season, to attract her stud “Sari”.

Her little one hid in between her legs sucking her breast. While I was looking at them sympathetically, my own breast started leaking milk wetting my dress. I sat on the ground hugging my child to my chest and started feeding him. Um Daham loved my camel Wadha after the tribe

¹ Mahroos in Arabic means smushed, thus the reason the tribe is named that after the incident.

² Means something that smushes.

³ (in Arabian and Muslim mythology) an intelligent spirit of lower rank than the angels.

started calling her Salehah's Camel. She says may God grant her the blessing of prophet Saleh's camel. I always like to stare at her and focus on her details; she's graceful with tightfitting humps, small flat-headed, and splayed thighs. She's white like hail in the middle of dark mud in winter. She has beautiful wide eyes with amazingly long lashes. Every feature of hers indicates that she is from an authentic breed of camel; Wadha the descendant of Hares.

Wadha was born three years before my first period, and I loved her instantly because we are very much alike. My mother passed away the moment I took my first breath, and the toothless old lady Um Daham raised me. Every time I asked her about my mother, she'd point at the sky and say: "She's with God"

Ever since I was a child, I believed that what happens with God is unknown. I always wished I was born four years earlier in order to be breastfed by Saleh's mother and so it wouldn't be possible for us to wed. maybe by then I would've married my cousin Dakheel whom I always loved.

Wadha's mother also passed away while giving birth to her first born. I remember how sad my father was with her death to the point I wondered if he got this sad with my mother's death, but at that time he had three other wives instead of her. Why would the death of a camel make him cry if every Eid he happily forces me to slaughter a sheep? He would hold my right arm which I don't know how to use, clasping my palm around the knife and says: "Bismillah, Allahu Akbar." I close my eyes when I hear the sheep cries and bellows as its kicking and thrashing moves my whole body. My father finds it amusing and laughs at the sight of his daughter that forgot how to cry, because of his treatment to me as a boy I started to giggle at it too.

It was the first time that I saw my father crying like a child who was forced to accept an irreversible matter. He did not bother to hide his tears as he helped his beloved camel with her birth. He pulled his sleeves up and slid his hand inside her wet genitalia. Her first born' head "Wadha's" head was crowning as well as her front legs. The mother started grunting and swinging her head, laying on her right side, and surrendering to my father as the blood flowed from her genitalia. My father knew she was slowly dying, the newborn barley got out halfway when my father removed the sticky membrane from her face and blew in her nose to remove the remains that are stuck in it. His fists clenched on her forelegs as he pulled her under the rays of the desert sun. she twisted her neck

as if begging to look at her newborn one last time. Finally, her head rested on the sand with teary eyes.

My father pulled Wadha on the ground and took her to her mother's head so that she might wake up to see her first child, but she did not wake up. My father's lip quivered as he sat down and grabbed her head and rested his forehead against hers. He gritted his teeth silently shivering.

I spent the next week nursing Wadha from other camels' milk. After that week my father heard that one of the camels that my cousin Dakheel inherited just lost its calf because it fell in a hole, just after a week of its birth. To solve the problem of her longing to her newborn they would create A Baw; Baw is the skin of the calf filled with straw, wool, and leaves. Then they would take the Baw and leave it next to the mother so she can sniff it and be assured that her little one is still there. This process is used so that the mother would keep on lactating. But now in this case who will be able to retrieve the calf's skin if the calf is dead in a hole?

My father sent Saleh, his nephew, to meet up with Dakheel, my cousin from my mother's side. My father was seeking permission from Dakheel to make that grieving camel a mother to Wadha. I was so glad they found a new mother to the orphan.

Within a half day we saw from far away a camel, next to her was Saleh on his camel alongside Dakheel on his horse. I was unfamiliar with him at first. He grew much older than the last time I saw him which was last year when his father passed away on his trip to Hajj. Unfortunately, his father's grave was lost and no one knows where it is located. He came with his grieving camel who still is not over the death of her calf. It is said that every night she goes missing and they go look for her, only to find her next to the ditch where she lost her calf wailing for her calf that fell and shattered its bones.

I did not allow Dakheel to leave with Wadha and I asked my father and insisted on him that I leave with them to the nearby ditch. Both Saleh and my father disagreed. I think my father did not want me to go because he did not want me to witness what will be done. But Hasna my father's fourth wife convinced my father to let me go with them as she pointed how attached I am to Wadha ever since her birth.

“Salehah sees herself in Wadha.” Said Hasna to my father to reassure him. He silently nodded his head approving my request. That made Saleh furious.

The next morning Um Daham told me to not go with Dakheel. She placed her shivering palms on my forehead and stated:

“The day is very long, and the sun is scorching hot”

I frowned and turned my back to her and walked away with Wadha heading towards my cousin and his camel. We headed towards the ditch where the camel lost its calf. Dakheel gestured with his hand not to come closer so that the camel does not notice the presence of Wadha. He never looked at me when he talked to me, instead he would look down at my hands. I kept staring at him, a man in his boyhood. He carried his sack on his shoulder and his rebab¹ walking in a desert where he knows all its routes except the route to his father’s grave.

Dakheel caressed his camel until she stopped wailing. He sang to her with a voice that soothes any wild animal. The camel did not bother to notice the greenery around her, instead she treated it like a wasteland. The ground was covered with all the flowers of the spring, but she did not stop to eat any of them. Suddenly she started to increase her speed while wailing again, so I knew that we were close to the ditch. She hurried and scattered the mud behind her leaving Dakheel behind. She flopped next to the ditch and started wailing as she moves her long neck left and right. Dakheel turned to me and gestured to stay away and not come closer as he expertly went to her to fix the problem. He took out a rope and pole covered with a leather rag from his sack. He sat behind the camel tying her legs tightly. He lifted her tail and pushed the pole inside her genitalia harshly. He intended to make her feel the pain to remind her of the pain of giving birth. He then tied her tail to one of her hind legs so she wouldn’t swat the pole out. It pained me to see that camel in pain, but I knew that this pain that she is feeling will bring a happy life for her and for Wadha. He took out a rag out of the sack and tied it around the camel’s nose because she will be able to distinct if the calf is not hers. He left her next to the ditch grunting, calling her calf, and moving her neck around like a snake in search for its prey. Wadha and I sat a little far. Dakheel came to us and sat down.

¹ The rebab is the name of several related string instruments that independently spread via Islamic trading routes over much of North Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Europe.

He opened his sack and took out three pieces of dates. He offered me some and did not stop staring at my left hand which I took the dates from.¹

“Seems like this sack contains everything.” I spoke.

He smiled before answering: “This sack is my home.”

After that, and because of him I started carrying around a sack as well. I started taking it everywhere I go. I carry in it my kohl, a wooden comb, henna powder, some accessories, and dates with dried buttermilk.

I removed the seed from the date and mushed it before giving it to Wadha because she is still too young to chew on it. I ate my date and stared at Dakheel whos’ mind was with the camel that was still wailing at the ditch.

What I love about Dakheel is his looks, as well as his knowledge about everything, although he is only fifteen years old, he has the knowledge of a wise old man. He wore the traditional head dress from a young age. I love his eyes; his eyes are wide and lined with kohl. His eyebrows look like they were drawn to perfection, but they were always furrowed. One of his eyebrows has a scar that was left by Saleh five years ago, and it left a white hairless line down his eyebrow. I love his newly grown moustache, because it reminds me of the feathers of a great grey shrike. He has two braids coming out of the headdress he wore that secured them down. I love his two braids as well; they are longer than mine. He is quiet, as opposed to Saleh who would not shut up about his made-up heroic stories about himself. I love everything about Dakheel, except his silence and the fact that he never looks at me. He turns his face away or stares at my palms when I talk to him.

After swallowing the date, Dakheel held his rebab between his knees, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. But before he could sing any word, I cut him off by asking:

“Where did you get it from?”

¹ In Arabic and Islamic culture, it is frowned upon to receive things with your left hand, that is why he was shocked when she took the dates from him with her left hand. She is lefthanded.

He opened his eyes and stared at my eyes that were fixed on his rebab, but he didn't stare at them for long. It's probably the first time that he looked into my eyes. He lowered his gaze and stared at his instrument:

"I made it myself".

"Are you serious?!", I asked

He traced his finger on the instrument:

"I made it with wooden twigs, skin of a calf, a cane, and hairs from a horse's tail".

He smiled without looking away from his instrument and asked:

"Do you like it?"

I was staring at his face when he wasn't looking at me:

"Wadha loves the sound of the rebab, when you do not sing of course"

His face turned red from embarrassment. I do not know why I did not admit to liking his voice. He furrowed his eyebrows and said:

"How dare you not like the sound of the rebab little girl, It's a calf's skin on top of twigs"

He closed his eyes once again. Dakheel moved the bow on the rebab's single string producing a beautiful sound. He sang words describing his despair about his father's lost grave. The lyrics of the songs say that he will not let anyone dig his grave. Instead, he will beat death by one day and dig his own grave on his own when he is old and grey. Then he will slit his throat as he lays down inside of the grave. As I pictured the lyrics I got scared, but I still loved the lyrics. His headdress almost fell off as he was swinging left to right while he sang. I held it before it fell and repositioned it on his head. He opened his eyes and looked left and right as if he just traveled to another dimension and smiled at me. It's like he forgets who he is when he's with me. I asked him:

"Are you serious on digging your own grave and slitting your throat?"

He smiled sadly and replied:

"I sing what I cannot do".

I thought about what he said, it seemed like a good idea that a person can choose the time of their death.

After a few hours the camel started to groan uncomfortably because of the gases that formed due to the pole being shoved inside of her. She started making groans and sounds different than the

cries she made over the loss of her calf. Dakheel rose from the ground, but this time I noticed that his eyebrows were not furrowed as they usually are. He asked me to follow him with Wadha and stay behind as he distracts her from looking at us. I was looking at him in astonishment. How can this boy that is older than me in only four years know everything about everything? I learned from him new things including the different names of wind, plants, and stars. And I am pretty sure that if he stayed with us for longer, I would learn even more things.

He motioned with his head for me to come closer as he held the grieving camel's head in his hands so she would not catch a glimpse of me and Wadha. He threw me a rope so I can tie the limbs of my little calf Wadha and asked me to lay her down behind the grieving camel as if she just gave birth to her. I caught the rope and stood there frozen while staring at the wailing camel and my calf that started to take a couple steps behind. He shouted:

“Stop thinking!”

I stared at him dumbfounded as he continued:

“Don't think, just do!”

I quickly laid Wadha down and straddled her to tie her up as I repeated his words in my head: ‘Don't think just do... Don't think just do’. Dakheel was staring at me with a large smile on his face as I tied up her limbs.

When the camel's pain started to get unbearable, Dakheel pulled tied up Wadha from behind the wailing camel as if she just gave birth to her. He left Wadha Infront of the camel for a while. Dakheel stood there observing them, while I stood there observing him. The camel was unsure at first and started sniffing Wadha to see if she truly gave birth to her. But the rag was tightly tied around the camel's nose. She started staring at Wadha emotionless unsure if it is really her calf. Dakheel picked up his rebab, closed his eyes, and started playing a song. The grieving camel finally calmed down, even though there is a pole still stuck inside of her buttock. To test is she got attached to Wadha, Dakheel walked towards Wadha and started throwing sand on her and started making crazy sounds as if he is trying to hurt her. When Wadha started being scared the grieving camel started groaning angrily trying to get up to protect the calf. But she failed because she was tied up which made her more furious. Dakheel was happy with the outcome, so he undid the rag, and removed the pole from her buttock. I started to untie the little calf as well. As soon as the camel

was untied, she got up on all her fours and rubbed her face against Wadha's body. Dakheel was laughing that the plan worked but I was crying at the sight of my Wadha drinking the milk of her new mother. I don't understand why I cried, was it because I was sure that I was happy that she has a new mother, or was I sad because I must let go of her now? I was jealous of that camel. How dare she take her from me? What if I took her calf before it fell in that ditch? How would she feel then? It seemed like Dakheel heard my thoughts and took out a bowl from his sack and gave it to me. I took the bowl and bent down underneath the camel and started milking her. I filled the bowl and went to give it to Dakheel, but he refused to drink before I did. Her milk tasted so good because she ate some of the flowers of the spring. After I had a sip, I gave the bowl to Dakheel. He drank it and started laughing as a line of milk foam sat on top of his moustache, and said:

“So...you finally learned how to milk, huh?”

He turned his back to me, and I couldn't help to be embarrassed. That feeling was unfamiliar to me, to be embarrassed because of a boy. I remember years ago when he held my wrists and taught me how to milk in the sheep pasture. Stupid sheep if I may.

“Don't remind, me I was a child”

His shoulders started to shake as he laughed harder. I would've gotten angry if I wasn't so in love with him. Or if I wasn't so stupid that day then Dakheel wouldn't be laughing at me right now. I was going to yell at him for laughing at me, but I couldn't because his voice makes my heart skip a beat.

All of us walked back to the tribe, and the camel did not stop to look back at the ditch, which was a good thing. I was dreading the moment that Dakheel was going to leave with both the camel and Wadha. Because now the Wadha is the camel's calf.

“Won't you please leave the camel?”

“I'd kill her in a glimpse if she ever left me for someone else.” He replied instantly.

My heart started beating so fast. Dakheel loves me, I just knew it.

My father was so happy when he saw all of us approaching. Dakheel left alone that day carrying the rebab on his back and leaving both the camel and Wadha to me. After that day in the ditch, I could not stop thinking about how he said he'd kill his camel if she left him for someone else.

Ever since that day Saleh hated Dakheel more than ever. Dakheel left on his horse at sunset, and I never saw him again. I forgot most of his few words. He was saying his farewells to me as he stared down at my palms. He told me that he found out the reason that the henna designs on my palms were different. I kept staring at his eyes, but he did not do the same to me. He kept on going and said that his mother, my uncle's wife, always compliments my henna designs. She told him that all the brides sit in front of the little girl that is the henna prodigy, as she draws them beautiful designs of flowers, leaves, and stars.

"You are left-handed", He said as he still stared at my palm.

I did not answer him thinking that if I stayed quiet, he would eventually look into my eyes. But he didn't. He kept on saying:

"You cannot do anything with your right hand. You drew on these impressive henna designs on your right palm, and you left your left palm to be drawn horribly by another girl."

I am not wrong when I say that he knows everything about everything. He was completely right. I do not know how to do anything with my right hand, except slaughtering sheep as my dad taught me. I did not reply to Dakheel, I just wanted him to look at me. Just one glance so our eyes would meet for a while. But he did not, as if I was invisible. He furrowed his eyebrows and smiled:

"I love the henna drawings on you right palm."

I answered him:

"Will we meet again?"

He turned to look at Wadha knowing that I love her.

"In the eyes of the camels"

I did not understand him as I do not understand most of his few words. He turned his back to me and started heading towards his horse. I walked quickly and stood in front of him:

"Other than in the eyes of the camels, will we meet again?"

He answered me as if he did not answer:

"Only God knows"

He left after saying a couple of last words. He left without letting me down which is a good thing, yet he left me without a glint of hope which is a bad thing. I lifted my head up and stared at the sky feeling the world spinning around me, as I remember the last words he left me with. All I

remember was closing my eyes from the sun. I suddenly awoke with Um Daham's old face. She gave me a drink of water and wiped the sweat from my forehead. She got closer and whispered in a voice that sounded like a goat's bleat:

"That's what happens when you stay in the sun for too long"

I was hallucinating. I was remembering things and forgetting others. I wiped my lips from the water that she made me drink and said:

"Dakheel loves my henna drawings on my right palm".

She slapped me across my face. I started getting my thoughts back. It was not a 'wake-up' slap, or maybe it was I am not sure. She gave me her back and yelled:

"Stupid girl!"

That day Saleh approached me and stared right into my eyes. He asked me about what Dakheel told me before he got on his horse and rode away. I did not hide anything from him and told him that I asked him if we will meet again or not. Pubescent Saleh asked me angrily:

"And will you two meet?"

I told him Dakheel's answer. Saleh squinted his eyes and looked at the sky, he then looked back into my eyes, and I saw something that is broken. I did not know what I saw, was it love? And is it possible I realize what love is? Even before I get my first period? I don't remember anything except Saleh's eyes those day.

Three years later Faleh came to my father angrily swearing that he will kill Dakheel, saying that Dakheel wrote a poem flirting and complimenting me. The poem also cusses out his and Saleh's father who is my uncle. He heard the poem being told by others. He then sent him mother to ask my father for my hand.

"That disgraceful weasel! He did it without honoring our shared blood!"

I was confused, his cusses towards my uncle were so rough. But the flirting poem verses came from a heart that misses me. These verses made me forget everything except the weirdness of his doing. Why would he cuss his uncle and then send his mother to ask for my hand?

I finished feeding my child and stared as Wadha, Sari, and their calf graze on the flowers of the spring. Every time I look at those three, I cannot help but imagine what my life would be if Dakheel was mine, as we walk with our child between the flowers of the spring. Then we would get inside our tent, and I'd sit on the ground listening to him as he played his rebab.

I do not doubt that camels have a brain just like ours. I am always astonished on how smart they are. Just look into their eyes that are surrounded by thick eyelashes and you can feel how sublime they are. You can feel their reverence in their silence, as opposed to the stupid sheep. It is said that camels are created from fire, just like Jinn and demons and prophet Mohammad agreed upon that saying. I truly love their eyes, but I can only see death in their eyes. But ever since Dakheel promised me our next meeting will be in their eyes, I could not stop myself from looking at them.

If the camels could talk, I would've asked Wadha if she really loves Sari or is she forced to love him for the sake of their child. And does her child deserve all that patience and sacrifice? What if her calf was not Sari's calf? Wasn't she scared the first time she saw him two years ago? I remember how cold it was that time of year. Sari was looking for a mate, but he got to a point that it was so dangerous for any female camel to get closer to him. He moved crazily as he produced a smell from his mouth worse than the smell of a skunk to attract the sexually driven female camels.

I was peeking from my tent as he was doing everything a stud would do to call for mates. He was spreading his urine by moving his tail right and left as he grunts loudly and produces foams from his mouth. Before my marriage I never noticed how male camels act in mating season, but after marriage I started to pay attention on how they act so that perhaps I would understand why Saleh acts this way.

That winter Wadha was ready for a mate. She sat on the ground between the flowers raising her tail and urinating showing off to the male studs what they want to see. When they mated, I saw in them what happened to me the first time with Saleh. I remember how bad it hurts, just like a knife being driven into my guts. I remember his sweaty body on my back and his rapid breathing behind my ears. It was a painful experience that ended with Saleh snoring next to me. I never understood

how other women from my tribe talk about how good of an experience it is and how their body shivers with delight. I also did not learn anything from Hasna, she made sure I knew what I was doing before my first night. Hasna was known between the women of the tribe that she knows her ways in bed. What I love about Hasna is that she does not go on explaining the details, because then she would be showing my father in an awkward light.

I remember how sari came closer to Wadha as he moved his tail aside to show off his large testicles. He put all his weight on top of her, biting her neck just as Saleh does. All a camel could do at that moment is groan loudly. Either groaning from a pleasurable moment I never experienced or groaning from pain which I am familiar with. I usually hide my pain by biting on to my wrist to hide any sounds. But I do wonder, am I sinning when I imagine Dakheel in those intimate moments? I imagine him handling me gently as he handles his rebab, worried that he might hurt me. Only Um Daham knows the reality of my imaginations. She always scolds me as in why I won't draw a henna design with Saleh initials. It is because my heart still belongs to Dakheel.

I look into his eyes and answer:

“I didn't draw them on my wedding to draw them now.”

She exhales from her nose in a mocking way:

“You'll be blessed with a child soon enough that will make you forget all about him.”

I gritted my teeth and answered:

“I'll kill it!”

That old lady blames me for my attachment to Dakheel, she wouldn't even mention his name. she shakes her head showing how sorry she is for me as she says to not dwell in the past and concentrate on the future. But what is the point of a future without Dakheel in it?

Saleh is never mean to me until he stares into my eyes, because in my eyes he sees his enemy, Dakheel. Unfortunately for him, he always does. He is always gentle with me when he thinks im sleeping. I usually pretend that I am asleep to give him the hint that I want to be left alone. I can feel him at night stroking my face, lips, and hair gently. And if he notices that I am awake he turns his face away. I know that Saleh loves me and doesn't want to hurt me. And I know that this treatment is just because he is broken. Ever since our first night together when I did not bleed.

He sat down on the floor with his head in his hands: “He did not respect you” he said in despair. Even though he knows last time I saw Dakheel was at that ditch three years ago and never again. He knows that nothing happened between me and Dakheel. But at that moment he was full of doubt, and I didn’t even bother to calm him down or defend myself because I wanted him to suffer.

He was kicking the ground and spinning around himself like a camel that is infested with fleas. I did not care for his pain; all I could remember was Dakheel’s words: “I would kill her if she left me for someone else.” I wished Saleh would kill me. That he would pull me outside the tent from my hair and slit my throat, or fire at me with his gun. But none of this happened, instead he proceeded to make love to my while staring deeply into my eyes, knowing this would make me suffer.

I put my son down to sleep and made food for Saleh. I cooked some rice, jerky, and truffles. He barley ate my food because he never loved my cooking. He shook off his hand into the plate and scolded me: “As if I’m drinking sea water!”. I tasted the food to check if it is salty, it wasn’t. He never even tasted sea water, he only heard of it from Quran verses or traveling tribes that came back from the Arabian Gulf. Saleh sat down underneath Wadha started milking her. Suddenly we heard speeding gallops. We turned and saw Faleh, Saleh’s brother, on his camel. He was telling his older brother that the forces of the Amir of Kuwait and his allies were doing a good job. They got over the cities of Najd and captured Zulfi, Buraydah, and Unaizah. And that Riyadh was given to Ibn Saud without a fight. Faleh furrowed his eyebrows and turned to me halfway before resuming what he was saying:

“A messenger from Ibn Sabah came to us, requesting you by name for battle on top of a camel” Faleh bent down and whispered something into Saleh’s ear. I grew worried when I saw them both glancing at my direction.

Faleh left with his camel that was racing with the wind. Silence surrounded Saleh and I as we looked at each other. He entered the tent to retrieve his English rifle and walked towards Sari to prepare him for leaving. I asked Saleh:

“What did you brother whisper to you?”

He did not turn to me as he was securing the saddle on top of his camel, he answered:

“Ibn Sabah men are preparing to meet Ibn Rashid at Al Sureef.¹”

I let out a gasp:

“My Uncles!”

Dakheel came to my mind. Is my tribe fighting his tribe? Does my cousin from my father’s side fight my cousin from my mother’s side? Saleh looked at me over his shoulder.

“Uncles from your father’s side are more reliable.”

He got up and came to me and gave me his dagger:

“May god forgive you and not forgive him”.

He held my hand, placed the dagger inside it, and closed my fingers around it. He looked into my eyes and said:

“I longed to shed your blood, but your blood wasn’t mine from the start.”

I didn’t say a word as he held my little boy hugging him to his chest, and I held his dagger to mine.

He got on top of Sari who stood tall, as if he knew that he is about to join a war. Saleh secured the head dress around his nose and mouth as he told me not to tell anyone his whereabouts:

“When are you coming back”

He stayed quiet as he was preparing to return to the tribe to stock up on ammunition. He stared at me with red eyes filled with tears. His voice trembled as he said a phrase I memorized with my heart:

“Only God knows”.

¹ Al Sureef is a war that occurred in 1901.

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