

Commended.

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## Dead Sea Psalms

The moon and sun cohabit the sky. The world turns.

Outside the citadel, a child climbs the tamarisk.

From the topmost branch with strength enough  
to bear her, she offers up her song. Under this sun,  
she sings, it were better to be born a bird.

Every falling star sends its shadow to earth ahead of itself.

Not far from here, a woman prays for peace  
and covers her face, opens a door and walks into it.

Thrown into a river, a stone wears smooth with repetition.

In a run-down farmhouse, two brothers quarrel  
over a poor inheritance.

Waves sound a renewed breaking of faith upon faith.

Through the streets and along the highway,  
boys exchange bottles and rocks,  
loading their slingshots with spent ammunition.

No desert counts the sand grains taken by the wind.

The girl by the well draws water for her bath  
and pours it back into the darkness,  
listening to the echo of its fall.

Keeping to the shadows, night waits out the day.

In an orchard, a woman watches the last leaf fall,  
baring the gnarled form of the fig tree.

More than one wall wears the grief of devout men.

Deep in the wadi, healers resurrect a date palm  
from a grave sealed two thousand years.

The Tree springs from a single seed.

On a rise overlooking the rift, a scholar sifts the grist  
of countless wars, finding no answer.

The salt of the earth corrodes the history of the world.

Outside the coffee house, tempers flare  
over chessboards  
and concise translations of dead languages.

Old men recite the law by rote.

The one standing on the west bank bears the weight  
of each stone for a breath before he throws it. Hooking  
the practiced tip of a forefinger around the curved rim  
he casts it, a prayer skimming the water's healing skin.

Here the dead float amongst the living.

Beside the river, a man's heart opens  
like a pomegranate.

Not all truths wear their true name.

From the roundness of mosques,  
from the upward thrust of minarets,  
the muezzin cry out to God.

How easily the light of long dead stars deceives the eye.

The song continues. The question remains.

Only one thing is certain: somewhere, not far  
from here, an olive ripens and falls.

Why burden this moment with the weight of others?