

**Facebook Archive of Genocide
(9/3/2024-20/6/2024)**

Ne'ma Hassan *
Translated By Sarah Enany **

March 9

My whole life long I've dreamed of having a house with a backyard; it would have a small bed of mint, where desert truffles grow in secret.

At the far end, I would keep a stubby olive tree and pick the olives in season all by myself, olive by olive, as a kind of indulgence and housewifely pride – the kind of housewife who sketches out her garden plots before she plants them.

I have known many houses, but I have never owned any of them. Even the one I thought I owned was near the Egyptian border: whenever enemy tanks approached on the occupation's way out of Gaza, we left the house to face them alone, and went away. We are like the Bedouins, migrating tentless.

When the tanks grew tired of the game of circling it, they demolished its wall and sat in the middle of its living-room. We came out barefoot, waving a white flag that announced our final migration.

Since then, I have learned that homes migrate with their owners. I no longer have a fixed address. I moved from makeshift house to makeshift house until the war brought me to the refugee center because of the flood, and I couldn't get a tent to keep me safe when the rains came.

I've grown accustomed to longing for a house. There's a warm doll in my little memory that still rolls around in my arms whenever I turn over on the damp ground in the refugee center. She tries to comfort the cold in my straight bones. The stiffness in them makes them perpetually straight, like a lamp-post defying the darkened street around it to create a shadow that proves it is there.

* Writer and blogger. Born in Gaza, Ne'ma Hassan is currently displaced to Rafah during the ongoing genocide. These archive entries from her Facebook page were translated with her permission. Author's page:

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100015774663334&mibextid=LQQJ4d>

** Professor of English Literature, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt

Cairo Studies in English – 2024 (1): 226–235. <https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/>

DOI: 10.21608/CSE.2024.298620.1179

March 23

Day (xx) of the War

Early to rise doesn't make you an energetic person, welcoming the fresh air of the morning and stretching luxuriously to gather the strength to get up—

The wind was wild in the night, as if punishing the tents for standing in the middle of the road.

My cold bed makes me miss the warmth of my children. Perhaps they are cold like me. Their little faces all turn toward me. Their bodies curl up like a closed circle with me at its center, awaiting the signal to move again, for I am the prima ballerina here.

Perhaps their breathing will create the required music. The sound of the *zannana*¹ is an add-on by the movie director to add excitement.

My son Mahmoud is starting a new job today: he's going to make pastries to sell to the tent-dwellers and to schools.

Aid coming in, and the availability of flour, has lowered the price, so it's actually possible to buy it. Only a few days ago we were seeking out flour like avid miners.

Yesterday the city was loaded down with sacks of wheat instead of the bodies of martyrs. This is a red-letter day. Indeed, it deserves lots of red letters! But I won't set them down so as not to trip up the guy who sells flour and let the city fall once again, unable to find a loaf of bread.

...At three AM, he knocked on his friends' doors, his classmates, so they could start work.

It was a light knocking. They didn't know that everyone was awake; we merely feign sleep to distract the darkness that surrounds us.

He went out with the others, alight with unaccountable energy – only for me to hear the sound of his teeth chattering as soon as he stepped out of the door into the cold. I had to smile, knowing his tendency to overdo things in his quest for personal heroics.

But the prick of pain within me forced me to confront the darkness with open eyes.

No more broken naps; no dialogue with apprehension now.

I must wake up as well. There is no space around me to stretch, or reach out, or even lean on a hand to help myself up.

I jumped up like a rabbit just let out of its cage.

Thinking of using a bathroom is hard for me to devote a lot of time to.

I urge myself to wait until first light to go to my children's relatives to use their bathroom. There's no other way to do it. I can't jostle a hundred women and children to use the public facilities; having the luxury of using another bathroom is like having a golden ticket to the Opera.

I take my three little daughters to answer the call of nature in a decidedly unnatural manner; we walk a long, cold distance to knock on a stranger's door, carrying bottles of water in our hands like something precious we check on with every step.

I don't care about the disapproving looks of the householders anymore. This is my right to life, to use a bathroom fit for use and I will not relinquish the use of this right.

Washing our faces, again, requires even more water. The boys can manage their own affairs, although I know they do it with an embarrassment I can scarcely imagine. But they are men in wartime.

I made each of them a bottle of water for bathroom use with their name on it.

They laughed a great deal! Walking down the street with bottles of water with each of our names, to beg admittance to a bathroom that might or might not be free. I even spoiled the girls by squeezing half a lime into the water bottles, instead of soap or cleaning products, which aren't available.

Consider this addition another undisclosed punishment.

Facial wash is also made up of lime juice and water: one small bottle of water for all of us to wash our faces, recycling the water by washing our feet with it as well in a broad basin so as not to allow a single drop of water to be wasted.

The idea of closing off our zone in the classroom with the school desks and some old curtains we had found has given us some privacy in our movements.

Getting the food ready for the little ones requires collecting small sticks that catch alight easily: my joy when the fire catches on the wood is like the joy of a child with a packet of potato chips generously donated by UNRWA to displaced children.

As for me, I hope to get a biscuit. There is a kind of secret excitement inside me induced by a little piece of biscuit, which is a luxury unavailable even to the rich.

Money doesn't have the glory it once had: a bunch of white paper to light a fire under a kettle for tea. Banknotes won't buy you the ingredients for that tea, not in a city empty of everything but death.

Water is a luxury as well. I no longer remember the flow of water from the tap; the moans of pleasure from the plastic bottle crackling with delight as it fills up with water blot out every image of civilization I have experienced before.

Standing in line for water is a test of your fortitude. You must remain upright, without taking a step back; you must not look up at any sound in the sky, even if the *zannana* of death tempts you with a moment of curiosity when you want to look. You must fix your eyes on the water-hose, extending before you like a good lifeline.

Lunchtime?

I forget that time no longer has any meaning for us. Our schedules stand in line alongside us.

The line for bread;

The line for water;

The line for fear;

The line for time;

The line for death.

True endurance is to come back from all these lines without losing anything physically. Your morale has suffered; well, that's okay.

Standing in line,

We wait for the wheat to be milled,
The smile of the man dusted with flour,
And the drop of a loaf of bread, free, into the battlefield.

Standing in line
Are a young girl trying to remember what her femininity meant;
A man singing to the bread oven;
Another trying to understand the screams of the burnt-out street,
And I stand amid this story
Collecting birds in my head,
For fear the trees will flee.

Standing in line
Is an old lady cursing the fields and the ears of wheat,
Telling you the names of high-up cities.
She sews the rope of hunger
To make a sack of wheat
Big enough for the men who guard the tents.

Standing in line
Are you and I,
A little girl biting her nails,
A man spitting on the war,
A woman putting on lipstick under her burka.
No water in the city to wash away our sins;
But we challenge Hell itself to produce a fresh loaf of bread
A moment before it's time to die.

Now brush off all the above and start understanding the language of darkness. It is to be your companion for the coming hours. There are many stories ahead of you. You may listen to them or be listened to; that depends on the humor of the jets above your head – a head constantly at risk of falling.

March 30

At School

I want to hear the school bell.
I draw a line of schoolchildren on the empty bread bag
And loudly applaud the morning school-whistle.
“Use water in a sentence before it runs out.”
That’s what the teacher said.
“Repeat after me: My homeland.”
Loudly chanted pledges of allegiance go unheard in the tents.
There are no books in my possession.
I wanted to make a pot of tea

Before winter comes;
The words stoke the heart of the fire.

“Where is my mother?”
You’re too old to search for her in the rubble.
That is Lesson Number One.

“Stand up, children! Now sit down.
Write: ‘I am from Gaza.’
Then mark down the world as absent.”

April 10

Before October 7:
“What’s your hometown?”
“Yebna or Burka or Beit Darras.”
After October 7:
“What’s your hometown?”
“The North or Gaza or Khan Younis.”
Thus, Grandma, our country has dwindled.

April 13

Before I left Rafah, I watched a funeral of sorts: a child passed bearing another child in a shroud. They were all alone. I stood there, watching each step the little boy took while carrying the shrouded figure. He avoided looking at what was in his arms, as if trying to forget. He was just walking, arms outstretched, with a white piece of fabric in them bearing something small. Behind him, a few people watched him walk, just like me.

I wished I could carry his arms for him to keep them company; but war leads us towards unmarked graves, with no hugs goodbye.

I still see that shroud whenever I pass by a grave walking alone.

April 14

And if all this bullshit stops in the miserable city... who will silence the war-drums in your head?

April 14

The world will see you if you go out with a bang
Or if your life is beyond the pale.
Learn how to be loud.
For instance, stand in front of a big truck going fast.
Or be in Gaza.
Someone will take a picture of your death.

April 19

War Diary

The sounds of bombing were like a storm battering at the window-glass everywhere. I could hear the invocations to God like a single voice, bringing together thousands of the displaced in a parcel of prayer climbing up everyone's shoulders to reach the heavens with an effort.

"Stay away from the windows!"

But the windows are everywhere in the room; there is no center to escape to.

The night has its own terrors in wartime. The more the darkness overtakes our surroundings, the closer the sounds of shelling, or of death, press around us. You try to tell which way is which by hearing alone; you must become a radar device, divining the missiles' direction so as to protect your little army when the next one falls.

Mossab grins, fear mingled with mockery: "Looks like our turn. Today we gonna diiiiiiiiiie!"

Mahmoud: "I'm craving sweets. Let it end in honey, honey."

I tried to join in their gallows humor. But I could not manage to speak of death as something accepted or awaited.

I said, challenging Mahmoud with a hard look: "I want to make hot *sahlab*."

Mahmoud, without missing a beat: "And I'm ready to drink it!"

We all laughed.

I asked each of my kids to do a task so as to prepare a large pot of hot *sahlab* to warm our fear

I lit a fire under a small coffee-pot and sat on a rock, stirring the *sahlab* in the utensil. I lost myself in the white bubbles that formed on its surface and tried to forget the sound of shelling around us; the screams of children; their fear; my own; our own death, waiting in the corner. All these things must be ignored right now. I must make hot *sahlab*.

I took the pot off the fire and put it out. I started to pour *sahlab* into the kids' mugs.

Suddenly, everything seemed to shift away. The mugs jumped out of my hand. The *sahlab* spilled on the floor. The windows came loose from the wall. The kids ran to me as I tried to keep them away from the shards of glass scattered everywhere.

I didn't know which direction was safe for us, but I reached out both arms randomly in an attempt to protect them all.

A house next to the school had been bombed. One of the school walls had been demolished. All our windows were blown out, and my son Mohamed's big toe had been cut off.

"Don't worry, Mom. It's just my toe." The darkness hid the blood-soaked floor under his feet from my sight. He was in pain, but he was trying to reassure me.

"Put the missing toe in something, wrap it up so they can sew it back on!" I started to cry because I couldn't find the missing toe in the dark.

I wasn't brave enough to look at the toe.

Mahmoud found it. I tore a strip off the hem of my dress to tie off the stump and stop the bleeding. "He needs a hospital now!"

"There are no hospitals or any transport this late at night."

"Okay, we can get our neighbor the pharmacist to stitch it back on without anesthesia."

"Then I'll take him to hospital!"

I didn't know that I couldn't leave the rest of the kids alone and go with the men to sew his toe back on...

Or stay with them and leave Mahmoud to take him to hospital under the air-raids and the relentless bombing.

I must choose now, between one inferno and another. The Lord watches over both.

Mahmoud went to hospital with our neighbor on foot, despite his injury. He walked to hospital on his bleeding foot. And despite my refusal to get his toe stitched back on without anesthesia, the hospital offered no better alternative.

Mohamed lost half his toe to a glass shard. The *sahlab* stayed on the floor, waiting for the story's end.

The scar on Mohamed's foot will make a lot of different sounds in future. It might let fly a few curses, given the opportunity.

April 22

What if Gaza was a river;

Would we flow through it, martyrs, to the far bank?

Where is the other bank?

On the occupied blockades

Or the closed crossing?

Would the water turn back

Or drown the lands that lie beneath the level of its sorrow?

What if Gaza was a vineyard?

Who would convince the drunkards that our vintage is patience, there on the top of the vine,

While our hoes remain for us to lean on?

No-one knows

That the world will soon die of a surfeit of wine,

While the women of Galilee smile, rolling stuffed vine leaves at the peak of good cheer.

What if Gaza was reeds of sugar cane?

A one-legged child will come out of the reed flute;

He will sing for his homeland and his mother. Then he will look for the rest of the story

In the empty other shoe.

What if Gaza was a hawk?
The pigeons' fear will consume us;
We will keep our eggs in the fridge
Before prices go up.

When we reach the precipice, questions nag at us
And Gaza gives no answer.

April 25

A drink of cold water is now the fondest hope of the people of Gaza.

May 1

You must acclimate to the place. Either it kills you, or you kill it. This is the law of survival.

“Killing in wartime is survival, Your Excellency the President, sir.”

In a moment of anger that swallowed up what was left of my calm, I swore I would murder *someone* if nobody noticed the pain my son was going through.

It was like entering a new universe I knew nothing of. It had a small square in a narrow corridor filled with running feet that trample you so that they can survive. With feeble hope, no more than the effect of a shot of anesthesia which you won't get because the hospital has run out, you will survive.

The longer we waited, the narrower the corridor became.

The emergency room doctor refers you to a surgeon. You wait.

The surgeon refers you to the internist. You wait.

The internist refers you back to the starting-point. You wait.

The corridor narrows to the end of your pains; you wait.

I screamed in the middle of the place: “Where are the doctors?!”

“They've all emigrated,” the surgeon replied.

“And the patients? Where are they to go?”

“Not my problem. Nothing matters to me. My whole family's been martyred.”

The country has become a corridor, sir. There is no room for anyone's pain here. Here it is, the corridor, narrowing in an attempt to leave. The only people who will remain are the martyrs, alone in the empty city.

May 6

In wartime, even the streets grow cunning.

Everyone throws up their hands, asking, “Where shall we go?”

No answers come.

May 6

Even the tent has abandoned us, Grandma!

May 7

What happens

When the thought you have long been living with leaves you

Like an acrobat, leaping aloft,

Whose fingers let him down when he arrives?

It will become a flag of triumph

Borne hither and yon by the wind, no longer knowing which war it fights—

A peasant woman, finding it, wraps it around her head to stave off the noonday heat;

Or a farmer, finding it, makes it into a scarecrow

For ears of wheat to lean on its shoulder,

And migrating birds to peck at its face.

May 8

The Tentwives

No windows to dust; no floors to polish; no water to wash away our guilt as mothers who cannot weep.

No corner, either, to share an embrace.

Here, impotence renders me armless.

May 10

I'm tired of being the wall. I want to do the leaning for a change.

May 19

I have traveled through the city till my idea ran out;

I still seek a tent in my migrant mind, and find none.

This is the city of disappointments.

May 19

I've broken everything around me that has wood in it

... and made a canopy of blankets to find a shelter.

I have found no tent, O my homeland!

May 20

Right now, I'm thinking of a loaf of bread

And a bottle of cool water.

Are there other causes for celebration?

In any case: a toast to you!

June 20

The goods that come into the country are few, expensive and insufficient for our needs. Ramen noodles and chocolate are the staple of the markets right now.

Calculated starvation.

[No date]

Numbered;

The limbs of our children are numbered;

Our cities are divided into numbers; our shrouds are numbered;

Our tents are numbered;

I keep counting wrong, and all these numbers are killing us.

Note

¹ *Zannana*, or “the buzzer”, is Palestinian slang for Israeli reconnaissance aircraft ubiquitous in the Occupied Territories.