

The Eye of the Naqrour

There is a Kuwaiti idiom that goes, "whoever eats the eye of the naqrour will never go out past the city gate." I find there's a lot of truth to this saying, but in what sense? I have a good *hzaya* for you. Twenty five years ago I had an American colleague whose name is John Carlo. John came to Kuwait at a young age and worked in the same bank as me, moving up the ladder until he was nominated to the position of chief general manager. At the time, however, the central bank refused to approve his nomination, saying that he didn't have a college degree. I asked him what he was going to do, and he told me that he had a better job offer back in the United States but that he was saddened to leave Kuwait. He had become like a hyena, only tasting the sweetness of life under the burning sun. I was rather surprised. An American who is financially stable, and on top of that a bachelor, and he's saddened to leave Kuwait! John went back home, but his words kept echoing each time I met a foreigner staying a long time in Kuwait. I used to ask myself what is it that is keeping them here? Is it mere necessity or something else?

I couldn't find an answer until I met Dan, the chief of architects who was in charge of designing The Promenade, a mall in Hawally. Dan was an American who married a Japanese woman, Shika. Once we were having dinner together when they had only been in Kuwait for three months. When I asked him how he was finding Kuwait, his wife answered for him almost immediately. "We have a beautiful home in San Francisco and we'll be heading back there the moment we finish this project." Seriously, she was not interested in Kuwait at all. I simply smiled and announced, "You still have three more months before your heart gets attached to Kuwait forever." Shika insisted that wouldn't be the case for them, so I tried to tie