

A collection of stories by the *Children of the Diaspora* by Karen Hannoush

Story #1 - Imagined Land

I have a secret to tell.
Sometimes, I do not feel fully Palestinian.
Perhaps I am not fully the *other*, either.
At times, I am as Palestinian as my memory holds—
A patchwork of stories my grandparents once told.
A timeline spun from the threads of my recollection.

That, at times, is all the Palestine I know.

Palestine is an imagined land to me;
A place of olive branches and orange trees,
Where the scent of *bakhoor* moves with the wind,
And the taste of *zeit el zeytoon* lingers on my lips.

I imagine the walls, alive with laughter,
The chatter of neighbors, and the birds gentle songs.
In the background, I hear the church bells ring,
And the call to prayer begins,
It is a symphony of nostalgia.
A yearning, as close as skin to skin.

Sometimes, I do not want to disturb that dream.
Sometimes, an imagined land feels far more beautiful than the one that exists.
For is it not the same land,
Where the trees of life grow,
That is stained with the blood of my people?
Is it not the same sky,
Where the birds once soared,
Now tainted with the bullets that shoot them down?
And is it not the sound of bombs,
That fills the air,
Clouding the laughter and drowning solemn prayers?

I know this secret is not mine alone.
I know this land is woven with stories,
And one day, perhaps, I will visit this distant place.
But for now, I will look up to the same sky,
And I will dream again.

Story #2 - A Letter to Syria

To the land,

The hope of freedom knocks at my door.
I know I should open, but what if it is no more?
I feel and feel and then I fall.
Without this pain, who am I after all?

For all these years, I've thought of you.
The land of my people, the home I belong to.
Now that I have you within my embrace,
What would I dream of until the end of my days?

Now, My heart has wept and the tears have dried.
My breath, I've held for the longest time.
How do I release this weight that grips my soul,
How do I rise, and make myself whole?

A wish for freedom, they whisper to me.
The end of pain, their words feel far from me.

In truth, this pain is carved in all my being.
My whole life, I've felt no less than its pleading.
But wait,
Do not mistake my joy for sadness,
For when have these emotions not worked in tandem?

You see, My people and I have fallen and faltered,
But we hold our ground, no more departure.
I feel and feel and then I fall.
Still, I rise and hope once more.

Story #3 - Sun, Soil, and Tears

I was raised on land, made of earth and soil.
A land that nurtures life, where trees grow old.
Their branches reach like open arms.
Holding me close,
To a land that never dies.

Now, I live far from those trees,
And the soil that once grounded me.
I no longer rest in the shelter of their embrace,
Nor seek solace in the coolness of their shade.

From a distance, I wonder:
Why is the life of this tree so different
From the lives of all the other trees in the world?
Does it hail from a different earth beneath its roots?
Does it breathe a different air?
Does the sun not shine for this tree as it does for the rest?

But then I realize;
My tree is no different from yours.
If it were yours that was besieged,
You would weep at the feet of its roots.
And if it were yours that thirsted,
You would water it with your blood too.

And in this knowing, I understand,
I am made from the soil from which the tree grows,
I come from the land that feeds its roots.
And so I am it, and it is me.

Our trees are the same.
But my tree waits for my return,
Just as I await its gentle call.

From this land, I was taken and to this land, I will return.

Story #4 - The Weight of Home

There is an anguish that exists only at home,
A pain of sorts that forms and takes hold.
Not the kind that vanishes with time,
But the one that settles, and takes root inside.

When I travel far,
This pain fades from my sight.
Not only is it absent from the stranger's eyes,
But indiscernible in their effortless smiles.
Only then do I realize,
That this quiet ache is the inheritance of home.
A weight of living,
That the outsider would never know.

And yet, when I am far,
My guilt eats at me.
If for a moment, I forget this sorrow,
It whispers to me;
Your pain is a covenant of living.
Just as you were born to breathe,
It is a compulsory part of being.

Though I thought exile would erase it,
This silent echo wonders, uninvaded.
It crosses borders,
And traverses seas.
The pain persists within, it does not care for the world around me.

And so I have learned,
I cannot be whole while my people are torn.
Nor can I be free while my people are bound.
When the knife strikes one, it cuts through us all.
So long as they remain,
This hurt will not wither away.

That is the truth of me and my people,
Our pain is a tether, discrete and unseen.
It is of essence, a love that never leaves.