

A Translation Into English of Khalil I. Al-Fuzai's¹ "Another Face of Disappointment"²

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Abstract

"Another Face of Disappointment" is a short story about a woman of letters who manages to change an old man's opinion of women, but she rejects his proposal of marriage at the end because of his age. The author in this story wants to draw our attention to this social problem; old males should avoid marriage to young girls. In addition, the author's society should encounter and stop such behavior³.

Keywords: Al-Fuzai; Saudi; short story; Another Face of Disappointment.

Translation:

Once the editor-in-chief said, "If you are happy, you will write well, but if you are sad then you will not have the desire to write. And if you write while being distressed, you will be like a beginning swimmer after losing a life buoy; you will drown in the sea of crazy ideas, your language will disappoint you after losing control of it because you lost control of yourself. Your happiness is your life buoy."

He remembers so and asks himself, "What is the meaning of being happy? What are the standards of happiness? Is loneliness the cause of worry? Why not fear worry, which does not give life the meaning of interplay with the self-circle and the social milieu?"

To stop writing means to stop his life... its personal meaning is connected in his mind with a group of factors and basics, none of them is a math theory that determines his stance in the frame of resolved equation. He sees that the inability to write is a case that he sometimes experiences without premises, so he writes at the moment of happiness and wretchedness, and at similar cases he cannot write and he dare not control it.

Today he experiences a case of inability to write. He is responsible for writing his daily column for tomorrow's issue of the newspaper he works for. He has to present it to the editor-in-chief before one o'clock. The hands of the clock approach twelve, and he is not able to gather his scattered thoughts. His confused mind prevents him from writing. One of his colleagues notices his distraction; he watches him tearing one paper after another after writing a line or two on each. So he says, "Is it a moment of labor, oh, man... why not settle your life... to become steady in your way of thinking?"

Another colleague comments, "These are the negative aspects of bachelorhood."

He does not reply...

He resumes exploring himself, preoccupied with the vaults of memories... feeling that this room, where he is sitting with two of his colleagues, despite its width, tightens the grip around his throat. Sometimes he sees beyond its walls, becoming a stage for a world full of sorrow... its walls keep away all the reality that surrounds him... to give room for the spaces of his thinking whatever its digression, whether spatial or temporal. Yet now he is unable to put up with this room as if it were a neckband. Its pressure increases whenever his feeling of its burden intensifies.

His ears pick up his colleagues' conversation, which is mixed with jokes and seriousness:

"Who is the luckiest girl who will accept him as a husband?"

"Say the wretched girl!"

"You are right, wives of journalists are strugglers in another sense."

"Don't worry about them... it's enough for them the reward of patients."

"Are these happy people in the profession of trouble searching?"

"Except for those who pay attention to the professional circumstances, and avoid marriage because happiness is comfort and rest, and this is one of the merits of the reproaching self."

"And what about the satisfying self? Do you want the percentage of spinsters to increase in society?"

"We suggest solutions, but we are not obliged to carry them out."

"Journalists of late time... one announces his anonymity to women, and the other wants the increase of spinsters in the society."

He does not need his colleagues' talk about bachelorhood to consider his stance with regard to women of whom he is known for his blatant hate. This sort of thinking is his main concern these days. He did not announce the secret of his hate of women. During his childhood, his father did not refrain from addressing the minute details of the relationship between a man and woman, using expressions the son discovered after growing up as improper and immodest. The scene of his father with another woman while his mother was away from home will not go away from his memory. That scene was repeated before him.

Also during his youth he indulged himself in pleasures and had shameful relationships with girls who were older than him. During the early years of his youth a trusted-by-the-family woman controlled him. When he grew, he realized the enormity of the mistakes he had made. He hated himself, hated women, and is still conscious of guilt; his enmity to women disturbs him until Leila breaks into his heart to wash with her innocence what was attached to his heart; the filth of guilty feelings. Her delicacy enables him to forget what rested in his imagination about guilty feelings, and she restores to him his confidence in women.

She opens a hole in the wall of distrust he fortified himself with. From that hole she sneaks in to change his certainty after she reminds him of his mother who was the best example of an obedient wife... and a kind mother... and a wise housewife.

Leila is his friend's sister. He became acquainted with her through the phone, she used to answer the phone when he called her brother. His friend trusts his good intentions. He does not object to their literary discussions on the phone. She has a literary talent that may require crystallizing, and he is the best to polish this talent. He published some of her thoughts that were poetry-like, and he praised her talent. Yet he deals with her in a strict way with regard to this issue... strictness that does not shun her, because it is connected with a surplus of strong passions.

He is an admirer of her ideas, and her serious presentation of topics they discuss when he tries to rile her or joke with her. She deters him politely, so that he is attracted to her more, and as long as he confides in Leila, why not propose to her? She will be a good wife for him.

When he asks her without prelude, "Do you accept me if I propose to you?"

She does not reply...

He imagines that she does not understand the question well, so he repeats it. Yet, she does not answer, because he does not want to embarrass her he asks her, "Where is your brother?"

She responds with a neutral voice, "He's with my father in the shop."

"When does he come back?"

"He may not come home before Isha prayer⁴."

"Well... I will phone him at the shop."

He tells his friend about his intention to propose to his sister. His friend asks him to wait for awhile saying, "let me consult with my father with regard to this matter. Give me some time... a few days."

Such affairs should take their normal course, as is the case here. Yet he says, "I thought you would ask me to come this evening. Is there a reason for delay?"

"There is no particular reason, but such a matter needs prelude and consultation. You are my friend and I know you well, but I am not her guardian, and the matter is related to her, and she alone is the one who can decide this question."

And he reassures himself she will accept, but he asks, "Do you imagine that she will reject? And who can prevent her?"

After a few days his friend surprises him saying, "Allah knows how I tried to convince my father to agree on your request, but he refused."

The surprise astounds him, he controls himself and asks, "What is his pretext?"

"Well... say what her excuse is... she is still young and see that the difference of age between her and you is big. I thought this would not be a hindrance. You are my friend, and I will not find a better husband than you for my sister, but the family is against this marriage."

It happened. This matter was not taken into consideration. He forgot or ignored that he is beyond 40 and she is not 20 years old yet... he rebels... the universe blackens in front of him though he realizes that her father is right; she is at the age of his daughter if his destiny permitted him an early marriage. He made a mistake in his calculations, yet realizing this fact does not prevent worry. He lives in a state of distraction he did not use to before... a state of hesitation he was not familiar with. Why not after her love mixed his blood and went deep into his arteries. It was a gust of love that moistened the heat of his life. She mobilized his manhood hidden in a marsh of suspicion, drinking the nectar of hopes. After his dreams were decorated with delicious wishes... hence how can he put an end to the flame inside his heart?

He has to admit that he has been unjust to all women by his suspicion, and that one woman brought double retaliation on him without resorting to offence. And it is enough that she put on the alert the remains of despair in his soul.

He pays attention to his colleague's voice, who says, "Let it alone." He said so with a joke, yet it found an echo in himself. Right now he should leave his affair to Allah... throwing this burden off his shoulders, lest the darkness of the past extend to the future of his days... and as if replying he says after a sigh that carries all his pains, "Yeah, you are right." He holds the pen again, and starts to write his daily column with optimistic spirit and remembers the editor's-in-chief saying, "If you are happy, you will write well," and wonder if he is really happy with this end. October 15, 1995³

Translator's Notes:

- 1- KHALIL I. AL-FUZAI is a Saudi Arabian short story writer.
- 2- This story was translated from the following Arabic source: Khalil I. Al-Fuzai. *Torture That Does Not Die*. (العذاب الذي لا يموت) Dammam, KSA: Eastern Province Literary Club, 1998: 129-40.
- 3- An introduction a reader may need to connect the text to its social context.
- 4- Isha prayer is a prayer said at night by Muslims.
- 5- October 15, 1995 is a date found in the source text; it may refer to the date of writing this story.

Author's Profile:

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