

Rose of Damascus

Fish

The candle stutters in the desert breeze
Sets the characters dancing on a dusty page
The hearts of darkness beat in the starlight
A burning bush, the ashes glow, charcoals blacken the embers
Show the words of the prophet
The promise of miracles, prayers of deliverance, faith in the fire

Before a timeless dawn the shadows crawl, the dew evaporates
The rising sun signals the movement a world in motion
The woodsmoke lingers in the patchy thorns
Where partridge scuffle a nervous squall, a panicking hare breaks from his cover

The figures wander through familiar lands
The razored rock, the scorching sands
Follow the footsteps of lost generations
That gathered the flowers to place in their baskets
The scent of the petals carries the memories
The eternal fragrance of the rose of Damascus

In the back of a bouncing car
Potholes abound on the dark road to city lights
Heading for coffee bars, singing along to the songs on the radio
The spell of a Friday night
Bewitches their hearts and banishes sadness
Lost in their teenage dreams, careless and free to their fate, they're oblivious

Her blouse unbuttoned, she opens the collar
Checks the mirror for her lipstick smile
Smoothing her dress, she glances behind her
Condemning eyes are now so far away

She moves in the bustling crowds
Her confidence shows, her presence invisible
The beat of the pulsing night lifting her
High on the wings of a butterfly

Deaf to the gathering storm, screams in the darkness
Whispers in alleyways
She joins with the growing throng, carried away unaware of her destiny
She breathes in the wind of change, heady with hope
The promise of freedoms
Leaving the lights behind, a tear in her eye
She heads into the darkness

She wraps her skirts in ancient tissue paper
Folds them away within the cellophane
Her heels in boxes, her blouse fully buttoned
She hides her heart until another day

She breathes in the wind of change, heady with hope
The promise of freedoms
Joining the growing throng, carried away unaware of her destiny

Defiance scrawled on the walls
Inspiring the ranks of keyboard warriors

The authors are all long gone, snatched in their sleep
Or dreaming in uniforms

Guarding the cellar doors from the chill powdered snows
From the Anti-Lebanon
That silently lay a shroud on the fields of the dead
And the Damask roses

Colourless men under colourless skies herd broken creatures
Reeking of fear into dark caves for slaughter
Desiccated heads pinned on the rusty railings, in a flyblown square
Where the pendulums of corpses, hanging from the streetlights

Mark silent time, on a never-ending war
Cynical rockets fly in on soft targets
Creeping artillery round up the districts
Over which helicopters hover, carrying Pandora's boxes to eviscerate

To eliminate the survivors below
Sleek roaring jets glint on the horizon
To arrive in a moment to unleash merciless retribution
A hellish symphony, a monotonous cacophony
A soundtrack for the carnage
On the petrified innocents, the interminable onslaught
From unchallenged skies

She came to in the rubble, in the debris of her memories
In a broken world she couldn't recognise
She wanders in the landscape, a solemn wraithlike figure
In the company of ghosts she knew before
Through the canyons of the labyrinth
The twisted concrete skeletons
The clouds of smoke and dust that fill the skies

The blinding light, it fell out of the heavens
And changed her life forever
She's no one left, everything has gone, she knows she has to leave
Nowhere to shelter, no food, no heat, no water
Struggling to survive
On the edge of the shadows, she's aware the snipers follow;
The clock is ticking down

She was searching for a vision, some sign to give direction
In this wasteland where it's a curse to be alive
When there across the crippled street, on a terracotta balcony
A splintered shard of colour caught her eye

The sweet familiar fragrance, the delicate fragile petals
Of the Damask rose
The flowers blown and battered, the roots exposed and tattered
It wills to thrive
Her nurturing hand wraps the treasured cuttings
In a fist of moistened clay
To carry on her journey, to find another homeland
Somewhere to blossom and come alive
The windscreen wipers battle futilely
Against the swirling dust storms

Their soothing rhythm and the movement of the bus
Providing some temporary reassurance
Lulling her into an uneasy sleep

Cautiously threading their way along ancient smugglers routes

Down through the valleys
Under a ceiling of stark starlight, her only baggage
The fragments of the horrors she couldn't leave behind
The passage was paid for in greedy exchanges
With callous strangers full of promises and peddling hope
Whose cold lecherous eyes followed her
As she took the transport up the coast
To a deserted inlet out of sight of prying eyes and guardian angels

She felt the sands shift under her feet
The waves racing up onto the moonlit beach
Dancing around her ankles
The ebb pulling her further into the swelling tide
Allowing the powerful but gentle lift of the chilling waters
To carry her to waiting hands
To be pulled up onto the fearful overcrowded boat

She stares out into the night towards the dark sea
That disappears into the horizon
Her past slips into the distance behind
Her as she nurses the slender waxed-cotton bundle
That holds her treasured stems, her roots, her legacy
Her destiny