

The Book of Daily Sorrows/Chapter One

(AL-FARI'A enters holding the baby against her chest. With her other hand, she carries a bag containing fresh baked bread and the baby's necessities)

DALAL: May the name of the Prophet protect you.

AL-FARI'A: Place him on the bed. He became bored with my lessons and went to sleep.

DALAL: You're so late.

AL-FARI'A: I have soft bread for you.

DALAL: Who has an appetite?

AL-FARI'A: You'll find an appetite, and you'll eat. *(She puts a platter down and arranges the loaves of bread on it)* Look how pale your cheeks are. If you don't develop an appetite, my brother will have nothing to embrace when he's released.

DALAL: Do you have news of him?

AL-FARI'A: I went and asked... as I do every day. They're still in the interrogation division. If they'd been moved to prison, we'd have known immediately. *(She puts za'tar and oil on the platter. She shouts as if she were in a demonstration)* Here's the thyme and here's the oil. Za'tar, zet, za'tar, zet, God damn the Shin Bet. Come, join me. We'll start an indoor demonstration. *(She raises her fist as if walking in a demonstration)* Za'tar, zet, za'tar, zet, God damn the Shin Bet.

DALAL: What is this Shin bet?

AL-FARI'A: You've never heard to the Shin bet?

DALAL: I don't think so.

AL-FARI'A: They're the agency responsible for security in the occupied territory, the agency that detains, tortures, exiles, and counts the breaths we take.

DALAL: God help us.

AL-FARI'A: Repeat after me then: "Za'tar, zet, za'tar, zet, God damn the Shin Bet."

DALAL: A heavy weight is pressing against my chest. My heart tells me Isma'il is not well.

AL-FARI'A: (*Continues to move around preparing dinner*) I know Isma'il like I know myself. He's a rock. The Israelis won't get a thing banging their heads against a rock.

DALAL: You're frightening me more. The Israelis won't stand for arrogance.

AL-FARI'A: Would you prefer a weakling who peed in his pants?

DALAL: I don't know what I'd prefer. All I know is I want him back. If you had any idea how alone and frightened I feel when he's not here. We've only been married for three months. When we were joined together in this room that first night I was defenseless, I couldn't contain my happiness. I didn't care that my father objected, that people around me were talking. I was swept away by the idea of the beautiful days we'd be spending together in this nest. He kept his secret from me. He didn't tell me about his other life.

AL-FARI'A: He didn't want to scare you, to spoil your happiness. He hesitated a long time before deciding to marry.

DALAL: Yes, he was hesitant. I almost gave up on him. At times, I doubted his love for me. The world turned dark, I felt lost.

AL-FARI'A: When he talked of love, he'd sigh. He'd tell me about the innocence and life gushing forth from a schoolgirl named Dalal. Her father was an important merchant, he'd say, who refused to accept a humble teacher with meager means as a son-in-law. When he spoke of her he'd confuse her with the land, the rain, the olive trees. "She's too precious," he'd grumble, "to get involved in my misery and precarious life."

Dalal: My father said: "If you continue with your obstinance, forget you have a father and a home." I told him: "It's a price I'll gladly pay." His eyes filled with rage. Were it not for my mother and his fear of scandal, he'd have slit my throat at the doorstep to our house. Instead he spat and snarled: "Get out of my face. As far as I'm concerned you're dead." I lost my family and my home and didn't regret it. I forgot the past and looked ahead as soon as we were joined in this nest. Every morning I'd feel ready, mature. Two days before he was arrested, we talked about having our first child. I called him Zahir, he called him Jihad. I was certain a seed was forming in my womb, but nothing was there but separation.

AL-FARI'A: (*She puts on a pot of water for tea and sits on the floor*) Don't talk about separation. He'll be back. And you'll bear so many children you'll be exhausted. Childbearing requires a strong body. Come, Dalal, hold out your hand. Eat.

DALAL: I'm not hungry.

AL-FARI'A: One word opens a conversation, a single morsel unlocks your stomach.

DALAL: (*Trying to eat, her eyes appear lost*) I've been thinking a great deal. He and I were not equal. His love for me occupied the margins of his life. My love for him took over my whole existence.

AL-FARI'A: You're being unfair. His desire to protect you came close to breaking his spirit. For him, you were light. When he used to ask me to look after you, his voice would tremble.

DALAL: Why wasn't our happiness enough for him then?

AL-FARI'A: Who can be content in times like these?

DALAL: We were content. You saw it. Our nights were filled with celebration, our mornings with delight. He gave up hard-won happiness for a dream as fleeting as the fog.

AL-FARI'A: You didn't see his face turn pale, notice his heart pounding when you embraced? And when the embrace ended didn't he whisper, "I need to rest"?

DALAL: He told you these details?

AL-FARI'A: No, he was too discrete to share the details, but I know Isma'il. I know he took these things to bed with him. He turned pale when he saw people arrested. The sound of posts exploding and towns being bombarded exhausted him. He saw what you couldn't see. He knew those embraces you were sharing were under siege.

DALAL: Was all this anguish sharing our bed?

AL-FARI'A: It was, Dalal.

DALAL: If only he'd been content with the happiness we had and stayed away from trouble. There are thousands of people around us who go on with their lives living in peace.

AL-FARI'A: This kind of peace is deceptive. Israel hasn't annexed our country to grant us peace. Just look around you. Our situation's terrifying. Death, arrests, houses blown-up, motherless children. Do you want your son to be born without identity, without hope? This child here, sound asleep... His life was laid with landmines before he was born. He's sleeping on top of one now. He and all of us are living with this horror. How could any of us feel safe? No, Isma'il would not have been able to sit in this room and stay out of trouble. In our situation, staying away from trouble means slow death, and we don't want to die.

DALAL: I despise politics, and I intentionally avoid the news, though I know we're living in a tragedy. But how shall I say it... You have to be in love to understand.

AL-FARI'A: Who told you I'm not in love?

DALAL: You are?

AL-FARI'A: Yes. One could even say I'm married.

DALAL: Married? Are you joking?

AL-FARI'A: I know you think it's strange. It's a secret no one knows but Isma'il. I wouldn't have told you if you didn't mean so much to me and I know you need to be stronger.

DALAL: Why the secrecy?

AL-FARI'A: We didn't have the time to tie the knot.

DALAL: What happened?

AL-FARI'A: He's in prison.

DALAL: For how long?

AL-FARI'A: Eight years, four months and nine days. I know the hours and minutes too.

DALAL: My God, for all this time. How long is his sentence?

AL-FARI'A: Life.

DALAL: Forever?

AL-FARI'A: Yes. And you still see me living, working and waiting.

DALAL: What is there to wait for?

AL-FARI'A: For him to be released.

DALAL: Are you expecting a miracle?

AL-FARI'A: Why not? We're people who live based on made-up logic, which applies only to us. Why not expect miracles in the same way we expect everyday life.

DALAL: Aren't you fooling yourself?

AL-FARI'A: Absolutely not. If we allow ourselves to be ruled by impossibility, we'll be lost. We won't be able to go on from one day to the next unless we know our dreams are possible,.

DALAL: My God, how strong you are, and your faith. Why did he receive a life sentence?

AL-FARI'A: Because he attacked an Israeli patrol. There were four of them. He killed one and wounded another. They arrested Omar and his friend Marwan. Both of them were sentenced to life. At the beginning they were in al Fari'a Prison. Then they moved Omar to Ramla Prison.

DALAL: Al-Fari'a?

AL-FARI'A: Yes. I 'd been there so many times that I'd start wailing absent-mindedly "Going to al-Fari'a, Going to al-Fari'a," so Isma'il started calling me "al-Fari'a." People followed suit, assuming the nickname meant a powerful, bereaved sister of men.

DALAL: They weren't mistaken. You are a sister of men.

AL-FARI'A: If only you knew. It's a shell I've developed through patience and willpower. I was thrown into a sea of sorrows without knowing how to swim. I was sixteen when my father died. Didn't Isma'il tell you about his father?

DALAL: Once or twice. I know Isma'il was ten when he lost his father.

AL-FARI'A: He was martyred during Black September, fighting in al-Wahdat Camp in Amman. He had joined the freedom fighters three years before, after the June defeat, which pained him greatly. He told us all about the operations he'd participated in. Muhammad was thirteen, Isma'il was ten. My mother, who was already ill, couldn't bear his passing, and she followed him soon after. Suddenly I found myself the head of the family. I had to look after Isma'il and Muhammad and provide the means for them to continue their studies. Myself, I stopped at middle school and started working at whatever I could to make up for the children's loss of their father. I succeeded with Ism'ail. He excelled at everything, but not Muhammad.

DALAL: What about the man you're with?

AL-FARI'A: Omar...was my father's comrade in his battalion. He brought Omar to the house one time and told us all about him. He was a young man who'd finished his college degree but left everything to join the resistance. He was a great help to me after my father died. In the midst of that calamity a beautiful, fresh feeling budded between us. The first time he held my hand and glanced warmly at me it was as if my strength evaporated. He'd disappear for days at a time and then suddenly reappear, and when he did blossoms would suddenly sprout in my heart. He loved my brothers as if

they were his own. The last time I saw him I promised to be his, and we swore we'd be loyal to one another no matter what happened, and I am.

DALAL: I had no idea you were bearing this burden.

AL-FARI'A: That's our life, Dalal. I told you this so you'd know you're not the only woman whose love is imprisoned. There are thousands of others like us, also waiting. What we learn is to be patient and to prepare ourselves for future happiness. It's as if you've turned love into a golden cage that confines you. Love must strengthen our wings, not make them weaker. It's about time we all escaped from our cages and discovered what is actually taking place. Your misery will not diminish unless all of us fight ours.

DALAL: What can I do?

AL-FARI'A: A lot can be done by one who is resolute.

DALAL: You mean resistance?

AL-FARI'A: Yes, resistance. That would make Isma'il very happy. There's no other way out, Dalal.

DALAL: I don't I have your strength or faith. This wasn't the way I imagined my life.

AL-FARI'A: You're not lacking faith or strength, but you're imprisoning yourself. (*The BABY cries*) The prince has awakened. (*DALAL rises and picks him up*) Play with him while I prepare his milk.

DALAL: Come here, Wa'd. No, no, naughty boy. Hungry? Right away, milk is coming. Are you wa'd... a promise... or *waghd*... a scoundrel?

AL-FARI'A: His aunt would never allow him to be a scoundrel.

DALAL: Did you hear that? You better stop fidgeting. Your aunt's looking over your shoulder. (*Loud knocking on the door*) Who could that be? (*AL-FARI'A goes to door, carrying the bottle the milk*)