

THE CREATION OF BEAUTY

for & from Mahmoud Darwish & Yehuda Amichai

I

Sometimes I want to
go back and forget

the letters of the alphabet.
I am tired of

my intractable hope,
tired like a room

in a hotel.
Behind my words,

dark as a moon,
the dove builds her nest

in an iron helmet. The soldiers
pitched their camp

in a faraway place and
she knows about

the resurrection of
the dead man

as he lies in her arms.

And I'll say:
I am not a citizen

and the prophets
died long ago.

One day I'll become
what I want,

not the peace
of a cease-fire.

II

Here strangers
hang rifles

on olive branches,
in each of their minds

a single thought.

In the morning a wind
comes up from the sea,

blows through
the empty chairs.

I passed a house
where I once lived

only to bid farewell
to what was

hidden within me.

As in a child's game,
he was lying

dead on a stone.
A girl by the spring

fills her jug and
every night

the memory
in the garden.

Both of us blind,
searching for

a god or a son.

III

If you speak
with a bitter mouth

everything living
will die.

On the bridge, in
another country,

he said to me: They
killed the little girl

from my childhood
and my father is dead.

I want to live
until every number

is sacred, then
forget them all

to remember
the victim

behind the curtain.
With the silent

closing of a door
now your daughter

has become a widow.
Nothing waits.

Things are indifferent.
The remembrance

of a journey in rain.
Like a full cemetery

I did not wait for you,
I waited for no one.

I was created,
then loved,

died and awoke

on the grass

of my grave
believing it was

all a mistake.
Perhaps my entire life.

IV

We measure the distance
between each body

and all my memories
are closed courtyards.

The detainee told
the interrogator:

My heart is filled.
I see children

playing in the sand.
I saw them on the road

to the well
before my birth. Nothing

disappears in this world.

On a bed of dew
a bird now

instead of us...It's too late
for all those things.

I washed my hand
before the mirror

and I knew one is
a murderer if he

witnesses a murder
and says nothing.

V

You can't go back
to anything,

but the perfect mistake
makes a perfect life.

And because of the war

a young man
marries a girl

but they have no place
for their wedding night.

I open an iron door
over which is written:

All that happened
never happened.

The almond tree
is in bloom.

What crime did I
commit to make you

destroy me?
Whenever I wake up

strange things
happen, yet

the author is not I.

VI

When he said: 'If I should die
before you,'

she was far way.

And I knew I wouldn't
dream any more

in the language
of desire. I said:

you killed me to forget
the woman you loved.

I protect your dreams
from the resurrection,

from the knives
of the guards.

You can't sleep at night,

you say: I don't
understand anymore.

I'm already lost. Is that
you again? Didn't I kill you?

The last train has stopped
at the last station.

No one is there. Friend,
which one of us

died before the other...

VII

Back then we didn't know

what they were
teaching, but we

learnt: Here or
there, our blood

will plant olive trees.

He said: I'm obsessed
with a reality

I cannot decipher.

When you journey and
do not find the dream,

touch each other
between the legs

at dusk. And only
after my death

will you learn I am
yours as your hand

is yours. And I was
lying on top of you,

heavy and quiet,
snow falling

on the mountains.

But in my heart,
where I live,

I have not withdrawn
from the world.

VIII

Because of love
and because of

making love, I asked:
Is the impossible

far away? But at dusk,
in the thin rain,

a cafe, and you with
the newspaper, sitting.

If I could speak to
the woman on the road,

I'd say: They did
what they had to do,

and drowned near
the shore.

And I want one thing only —
let me touch my mouth to yours

one more time
before you cease to love it.

I have nothing to say

about the war, nothing —
and don't want a country.

Like dogs, drawn by
the smell, he said:

We will live, even if
life abandons us.

IX

A woman once
said to me: If you

wish to speak, you
must take action.

Everything comes true.

It's possible we might
find an answer.

In foreign cities
I rent hotel rooms

to desire or to disappear.
As fate would have it,

sometimes she is naked
and not alone.

He said: I have reached
the end of the dream...

These words come to me
now like flies.

Everything begins to
resemble everything else.

It's as if I had died before...
Don't promise me anything

and forgive me for
the things I didn't do.

X

'I wish I never loved you,'
includes the pain

of all that did not happen.
But the night disappears

into the night where I
waited many years ago,

when I was a little boy.
I have the wisdom of one

condemned to death
for things I don't know.

Sometimes a whole life
passes: Don't let that happen.

Repeat the words again.
Perhaps she has come

to love you. And other words
like these: How far is far?

Or the mystery of
words like:

No more, no less.

XI

This land is less
than the blood

of its offspring.

If it were up to me
to bring back

the beginning,
I would.

Words are simple.

I know that I know
how to kill.

Still we celebrate,

punctuating time
with the same

ancient machine.
Whenever I think

about the woman
and the garden

I want to return.
At night I walked again

along the row of
empty willows — no one

behind me; no one
ahead.

But what's the meaning
of this thing?

We talked a great deal
about death.

The soldiers in the grave
say: You, up there.

What do you want?

XII

And as if nothing
has happened

war here pretends
to be peace.

This is the situation.
Do not forget

the people of the camps.
Most of our lives

we are busy
with the dead. The dead

do not dream much,
and if they do,

things tend to be lost
and found again.

Tell me the name
of this wound.

Words haunt me.
They haunt my life.

Here they killed me.

Once a bomb exploded
in the language of desire.

I still remember
what it said: Nothing is

left of me except you.

XIII

A woman once told me,
I know this story.

We bear the pain
all our lives. It's

the lightness of
the eternal

in the everyday.
I don't know what words

make them happy.
For me it's essential

to reject death.

She slipped off her long dress
and a legacy of chains.

The train went swiftly by
and suddenly I wept,

because of so much.

On this evening I
think again:

If you were another,
if I were.

XIV

I hear footsteps in the dark,

of insomnia
and eternity,

of a woman I loved.

I said: Are you talking
to yourself or to me?

I cannot help you.

After making love
we stood once more by the sea.

The war had ended.

What else was I
supposed to do for you?

I was neither
dead nor alive.

Words begin to
abandon me...

They gagged his mouth.