

Voices Israel

Poetry from Israel and Abroad

Edited by
Michael Dickel
&
Sheryl Abbey

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Michael Stone

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VANQUISHED

I am old, old,
so old my body shrank, and
they think my mind went years ago,
like my smooth flesh
and long, glossy hair.

My womb is shrivelled
fruitless now,
and when they come to visit
I will not answer them.
So there!

They bend and peer
and talk to me in tones like those
I used for them
when I changed their nappies.

I cannot speak, and so
they think I am a fool,
but I am very old and
vanquished by my body.

Michael Stone

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PLUMBERS

The plumbers broke
holes in the walls
looking for the source
of the leaking water.

They smashed ceramic tile,
jack-hammered cinder block,
shattered crazy pavement,
cut an incision through the front rose stone.

They replaced the pipe,
began to repair the damage.
But the tap water is brown,
the house covered in white dust.

Then
in a quiet inexplicable moment
Your head tilts slightly
To the left
And

Out of the corner
You see something glinting

On the rooftop terrace
or light reflecting off
A white substance that rustles and
flaps gloriously in the insistent wind

A peek of pink
on telephone wires track their heads under
the man sitting next to her. Birds
select brushing her shoulder against
begins to land. A woman falls

A small happy bird
Out of the corner
And gleaming

so they put their hands deep into empty pockets and felt for what to do next
had a moment where everything they wanted suddenly came to be
who once, on a bright Tuesday, woke, and, after eating,
behind glass windows across the pleated laps of men
and legs at the old women who are yelling
jumping up and down waving tits and tongues
On the corner, the man begins

I

II

III

IV

.....
THE FIRST TIME

The first time I came by bus up the old winding road,
Through Bab el-Wad with its skeleton trucks
then still where they had been burnt out in '48,
or just dragged aside.

The first time, the bus drove down Jaffa Road,
Before the market, one-story store-front shops,
of tinkers, carpenters, and small goods.

Down to the old Egged station on Jaffa Road,
just up from Zion square, and the small, single storied
city with the Jerusalem restaurant, where you could buy
a ticket on Friday for Shabbat lunch.

No Old City then, with its water cisterns, its alleys,
its Naomi Shemer romance,
but just great concrete walls, too high to look over,
because of the snipers on the city wall corner
at Allenby Square.

Israel was a dozen years old,
I was not twice that, but
I was home then, home.

Please, Lord, in this new era,
accept the diverse

beliefs and faiths
that we express
and accept
the diverse
beliefs and faiths
that we express
and accept

Within His hand my soul I set
Before I sleep as when I sit
And with my soul, my body set
The Lord is mine, I shall not fear