



Mona Nasrallah

# *To Emily*

*my Mother*

مؤسسة دار الجديد | Dar al Jadeed



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**Emily Nasrallah** (1931 - 2018): Acclaimed and loved Lebanese author. Her most famous book, *Birds of September* is regularly read in schools.

**Mona Nasrallah:** Physician at the American University of Beirut Medical Center, daughter of Emily.

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## *Contents*

Saada | 9

The Dream | 11

What Remains? | 15

I see the World Through Your Eyes | 23



## *Saada*

إلى سعدى

Is this how people from this village die?  
So gracefully  
So lightly  
They just fly

Saada had withered  
Became like a feather  
With her eyes as shiny as ever  
With her mind so clear  
As to remember  
Me  
Before I had even  
Met her  
Iskandar said the bell had tolled  
I heard it before I had called  
My anguish spurting out at once  
Leaving me overwhelmingly numb  
My longing for her hands to hold

Knowing they carry innocence and play  
Of two beautiful little souls  
Bright and curious about the world  
Even though each walked her way  
To Mount Hermon they returned  
To Kfeir, that beautiful place

From their bed, in which they withered  
Serenity filled the space  
I walked in and my tears flowed  
I've been with them every day  
Though one was my mother  
The other a 'stranger'  
Within my depth  
They both remain

*For S.T.*

*Mama's childhood friend and classmate whom I only met 6 days before she passed; she was lying in bed, in a simple room with almost no other furniture, bathing in sunlight, coming through the window of her little stone home, overlooking the church and Mount Hermon.*

*22<sup>th</sup> of May 2019*

## *The Dream*

الحلم

You appeared in my dream  
Soothing, heartwarming  
Gliding towards me so lightly,  
You almost looked like a kind specter  
Were it not for your beaming  
Eyes and face, radiating light.  
They were real, flesh and blood.

The dream had overshot in time,  
For you were the young reserved and aspiring  
woman,  
Who had just moved from her village to the big  
city.  
You wore a head veil  
Loosely enough to show that your hair was cut  
short  
A modern acquired look

And your thinness made your slender body  
seem even taller...  
I invited you to sit  
On a chair near mine  
To watch some kind of a show,  
And helped you to the seat as the space was  
tight,  
And chairs were aligned front to back.

Before I reached you,  
You were surrounded  
By many loved ones who had gone up  
To greet you.

Then you were mine,  
I had you  
And I think you were happy as well  
To be with me...

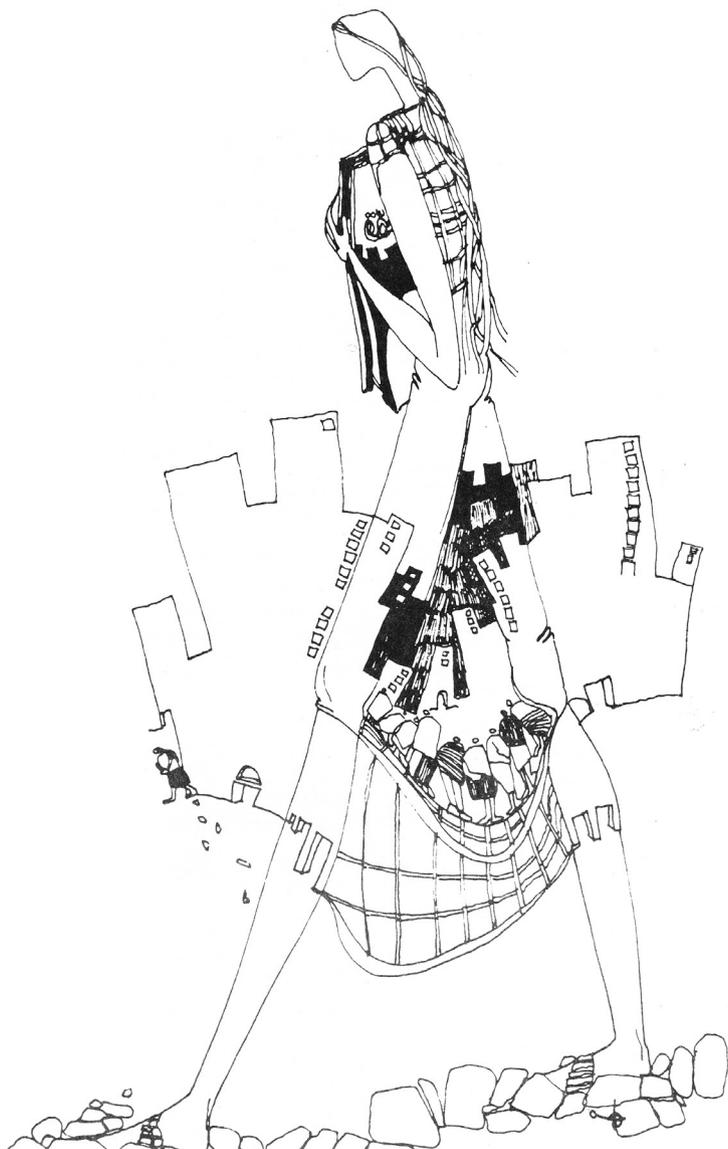
I did not have a chance to know what show we  
wanted to watch  
I woke up before it had started  
With a calm smile,  
Feeling I have just been blessed.

You visited me  
Just like your mother had done

Around Mother's Day.  
You're with me all the time  
But when we sleep,  
And during certain special periods of the  
Cosmos  
Maybe we open doors,  
Secret doors  
Between souls.

*I had a dream, inspired by the story Mama wrote about her late Mother  
Teta Lutf'a, when she had visited her during her sleep on Mother's. Day  
Al-Malak, Awraq Mansiyya, Dal Al Ibd'aa, 1985.*

*20<sup>th</sup> of March 2020*



## *What Remains?*

ماالذي يبقى؟

During my teenage years, my mother used to drive me to many of my activities: piano, ballet... As I used to accompany her to some of her own. For example visiting her publisher, or during earlier days, spending time at the Lebanese American University (BUC back then) where she worked for a brief period. This implied that I used to spend a lot of time with her in the car...

I don't remember if we talked much (likely not as I tended to be silent as a child), but some conversations did stick in my mind. One day, I understood from her that she had visited a clairvoyant woman; being interested, I asked her what she had predicted for her. She said: "*Inno Bzeesh Lassabzeen*"...

She mentioned it in a reassuring way, as she must have not even turned 50 at the time... But for

me, this statement was the start of a whole new source of anxiety, the realization that Mama's life was finite.

I remained for many years worried about her turning 70, and I made sure, from my faraway years in Cleveland, that I flew in regularly to see both my parents, and especially to celebrate the 'turning seventy' milestone on the sixth of July 2001.

I remember clearly the gratitude I felt the moments I was between both my parents, whom of course, continued to carry me even when I was far...

Time passed; I moved back to Lebanon, and both my parents were aging, but in relatively good health... I realized (gladly) that the woman's prediction was wrong, and my dear mother hit her 80's with another very high moment in our life, when all her siblings and their spouses returned from Canada to celebrate... Seventeen people, some of whom had never been to Lebanon, and many who had not been back for 30-40 years...  
"zawdat Touyour Ayloul..."

It was only few months after that high moment

of October 2011 that our dear father flew away discretely to the alter world...

He had followed many loved ones already: after my mother and father's parents, his dear brother Emile, and uncle Jean, life-long friends Fadlo and Albert... His leaving seemed like a difficult, but inevitable passage...It was the beginning of a decline in Mama's health.

Nonetheless, within her sadness, she gathered a new strength, and was able to recreate their usual open home of giving...

Her apparent fragility drew us even closer to her, and this only decupled at the diagnosis of a double stage 3 cancer 27 months earlier: breast and kidney, all in one CT scan, in one sitting, in one fateful ten-minute moment...

I could not sleep that night, so worried was I to lose my mother overnight from cancer and perhaps the psychic's prediction was only a decade off?

The 27 months, and more exactly 803 days which followed were truly lived day by day, and cherished as such. Not a single day would pass

without talking to dear Mama usually several times, and most days, I would see her along with my sister, in her new home overlooking the sea... My brother-in-law and husband, nieces and nephews were often there as well, as were my brothers and sisters-in-law's trips... Friends and extended family also roamed frequently, with serendipitous visits of long lost friends, to the culminating gatherings of Sunday Breakfasts which in fact started at 8 AM and extended until the afternoon...

Twenty-seven months, 803 days passed during which such unimagined fulfilling and high moments were born:

The Goethe Medal, Mama's ability to travel and receive it, alongside all of us, her numerous honors and recognitions, not to mention her receiving Lebanon's Cedar Medal...

Putting out two books, which she held deep at heart; the first one in recognition of the talent and good deed of artist Jean Mechaalany, and the second one in recognition of her grandmother and two uncles who formed her early childhood...

Adventures with people who like butterflies,

lightened up her last days: the talented Keserwani sisters, and the Dar Onboz team who understood and embraced her spirit so well and reflected it in the last book production...

Her beloved cousin Shirley's visit, the Gauches, Norma Slim, Ann Kerr, and her brothers again...

I cannot recount all the precious moments, and I wish to spend the rest of my life reminiscing on them.

But with her exit, I cannot but ask myself: what remains?

Other than these beautiful memories, and her extraordinary writing, what remains?

Other than the good deeds and the love she spread around, what really remains?

Her beautiful corpse, like a shell, was put that day to rest and is likely withered by now, so what remains?

I cannot conceive that Emily Nasrallah's life is confined to the period extending only from the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1931 until the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2018 nor

can I accept that it is only the memory of the good deeds, the love, the words, the books, that remain... All in one form or another, material things, and proper to this world...

Mama, from as early as she describes herself, had a special connection to nature and to the divine...

We all felt it, and saw it grow so strong during her difficult years, so that in the end, we truly felt she was a higher spiritual being with her soul connected to the other world, while so gracefully grounded with us.

When we will all exit someday, and our children as well (hopefully in many many far away years) and the generations who read my mother also go, and when the whole world will crumble, with no memory left, not in the mind of people, nor in books, I ask myself: where would my mother be?

I close my eyes and try to transcend the physical, 'still' memories her essence has gifted us with, as it is the connection with her soul which is my essence...

And that is what I think would be what remains. The essence of our beloved ones perfume our world beyond our senses and intellect...

Consciously or not, all those who left and whom we love are there, affecting our own being and adding to it...

In this connectedness, we all become part of the divine, each with the unique flavor of our soul. And beautiful hers is...

Radiating love and kindness from every cell, every atom, every atom's memory, and from beyond her physical being.

*Written for Mama's fortieth  
4<sup>th</sup> of April 2018*



*I see the World Through Your Eyes*

العالمُ من خلال عينيك

Two years  
And you are ever so strongly in my present.  
I see the world through your eyes, and react to it  
the way I think you would have done  
With kindness-  
I try to resort to wisdom as well,  
But while it's easy to have your love invade my  
heart,  
And take charge of it,  
Your mind is simply so grand  
And free,  
That I can never claim any grasp on it...  
Only bewilderment.  
I read your books, your diaries,  
Remember your words, all the stories you love  
to tell  
Look at your photos, at your eyes in them, or  
the mood you were in  
I ask people who knew you to tell me some new

moments about you...  
Just to bathe in your presence.  
Never to contain you,  
Not even to understand you.  
You function differently,  
You are made otherwise.  
And how I feel the need to have your perception  
of our world today...

Two years  
That was the time it took for the cancer to  
snatch you away from us...  
Yet each day was lived so intensely.

Two years  
The world has turned upside down,  
A quarantined revolution  
A robbed people  
A country taken hostage...  
What will it be in another  
Two years?

The values you stood for have never been as  
strongly needed and as much reclaimed as they  
are today:  
Social justice  
Freedom of expression

Freedom to simply be  
Especially for those oppressed  
And simple celebration of life  
Of the gift of nature.  
The significance of money shattered overnight  
A tiny virus shook world order  
And decreased pollution in a month  
More effectively than all the environmental  
summits combined  
Logic is volatile  
And your values remain.  
Birds continue to fly South in September, and  
return in the spring. This too may change  
one day. But the message they carry of living  
genuinely, with no limitations, will remain...

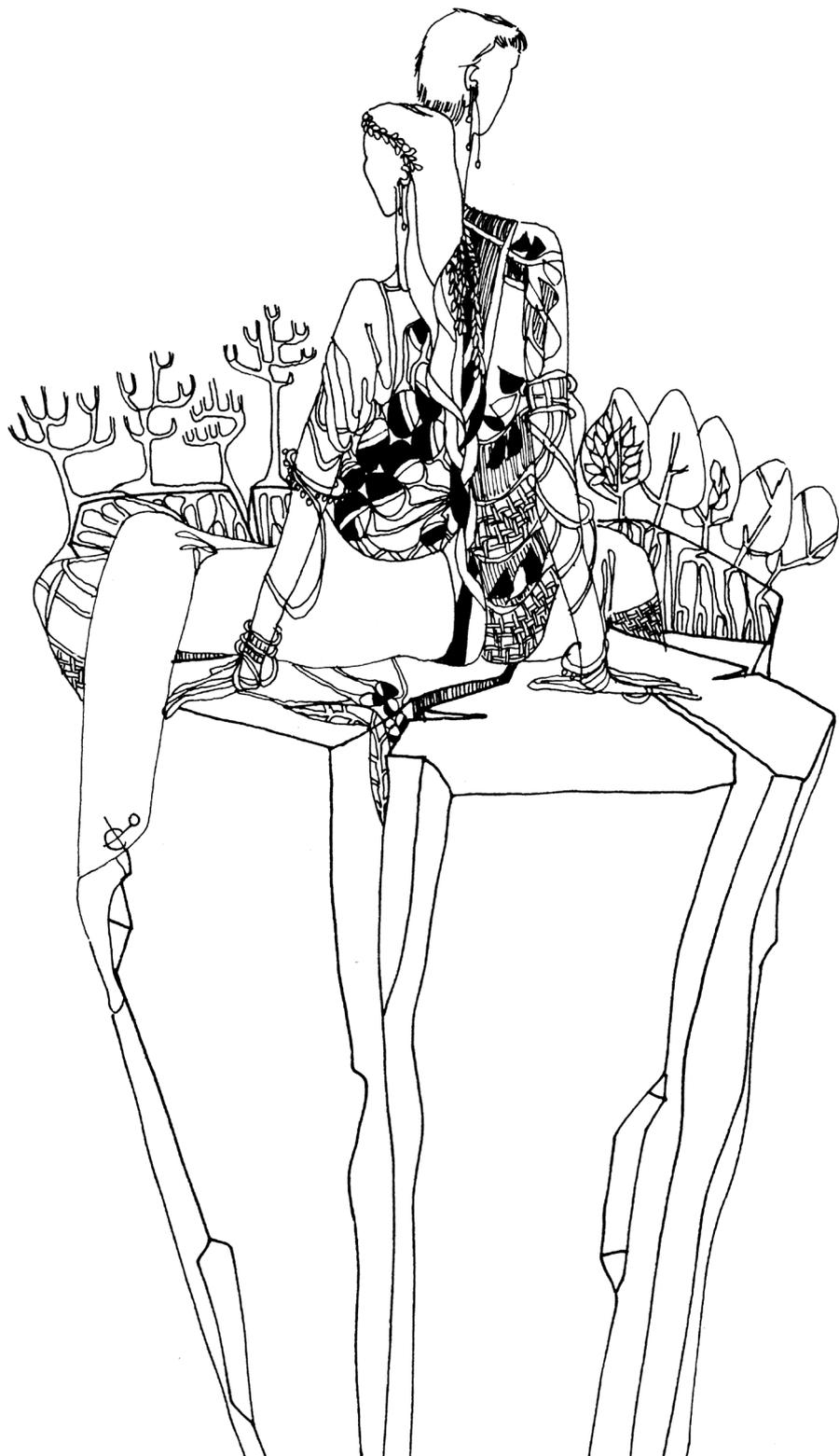
*Mama's two-year memorial*  
*13<sup>th</sup> of March 2020*



I miss you mama  
We never know how strongly  
The light  
Shines  
Until  
It is  
Off

I miss your kindness  
So I  
Became  
Kinder





*“I miss your kindness  
So I  
Became  
Kinder”*

*Mona Nasrallah*