

on stargazing from rock bottom

Afaq Mahmoud

my family is a weeping willow that has forgotten how to cry some people are dealt the short end of the stick we were dealt a gun that would not stop firing my family is a burning bush war taught us to have faith in each other in the river in god who (like the violence) was always there even on the days we tried to convince ourselves otherwise even when we resented the fact my family is an olive branch that has never known peace we know how to rebuild houses if not each other we know that when you mix water with sand you make cake and a good rock and a good wrist is all it takes to make the Nile dance (or to wash out the blood) and if you skip stones with your cousin on a Saturday he'll live long after the Sunday that kills him and sometimes when you're four years old and the war comes bullets sound like god clapping and sometimes when you're twenty years old and the rains fall thunder sounds like war brewing and when the drought comes it will stay and when the famine comes it will stay and of all those who've loved and held and hurt you war is the only one who stays from rock's bottom you can still see stars so if your uncles lungs stop expanding guava will still taste just as sweet and if you laugh until it echoes you are not forgetting the war it is okay to forget the war and if you cry until it echoes, you will not drown and if you start to feel at home in another country, you are not forgetting where the bones are buried and soon you'll learn that every country is a graveyard, and soon you'll learn that you don't have to be you will learn to live outside of the warzone and you will find love there you will never live outside of a warzone but you will live the corpses will always outnumber the funerals but you will not be one of them you'll always be running, but not always away you will meet people who only know war in terms of metaphor resent the war, and not them hurt will find you in other lands not all the monsters will look like you when you can't make peace, make dua and never forget how to fight for your life and never forget of the lives worth fighting for know that the pain that won't kill you is still valid the rights that won't save you are still worth fighting for and injustice without the bullet still needs addressing

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