

# Aleppo Diary

*Fouad M. Fouad*

*Translated from Arabic by the author and Norbert Hirschhorn*

1.

Writing hurts.

The blood dripping down the TV screen  
poisons the air,  
stains the couch with what looks like  
dried coffee. We touch, trembling,  
afraid of infection.

Our backs bent as if descending to hell,  
red and brown rust spots  
reflect on our faces.

We rub our heads, turn away,  
and lick the salt from tears.

They who crawl from street to screen  
leave green traces on the tarmac,  
which burst into bushes of basil.  
They throw us a flower and die quickly  
to spare us from shame.

Take off your shoes, walk on broken glass,  
for now you are in a sacred valley.

2.

I sit on my balcony. Aleppo, spread before me, black and deserted. A clatter of dishes in the dark means life does go on. No other sound save sporadic gunfire somewhere distant until a peculiar whistle before the shell explodes. Someone leaves this earth with a dry throat. Aleppo before me

remains black, and still. Those huge shadows might be trees, or childhood goblins or black vapours exhaled by women waiting for their children, they already numbers in a news bulletin.

3.

Perhaps a time to water plants growing  
by a fallen wall, a shattered alley  
in the black-and-white city named Aleppo.

In the gap between two houses, a sparrow  
trembles in a child's hand, and a sniper  
combs his pomaded hair behind a stack

of books shielding against death from the sky.  
Inside the church an angel, wings outstretched,  
pierced by tears and bullets, and a boy

smutched with dust, laughing. The sniper sucks  
seeds from a pomegranate, lets his rifle  
rest against a wall. In Aleppo.

In Aleppo, Death grows in alleys like a  
rotted plant, pours from the sky:  
nuts, bolts, TNT and chlorine.

Death stares into the mirror  
for one moment, turns, sights,  
pulls the trigger.

People on bread lines know all this.  
Also children reciting in school.  
And a hunchbacked old man.

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“Aleppo Diary” was published by The Hippocrates Press as part of Dr. Fouad’s poetry collection, *Once Upon a Time in Aleppo* (2020). For permission to reprint Fouad M. Fouad’s “Aleppo Diary,” grateful acknowledgement is made to The Hippocrates Press, London, UK. The poem has also appeared in *ArabLit Quarterly* and the anthology *The Hundred Years’ War* (Bloodaxe Books, 2014). Dr. Fouad would like to extend his appreciation to his friend and co-translator, Dr. Norbert Hirschhorn, for “masterfully translating his original Arabic poems to make them read as if they were originally written in English.”

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[https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED\\_a\\_02005](https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_02005)