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THERE IS A SEAT FOR ME

—*translated by Zahi Khamis and Kim Jensen*

There is a seat for me in the deserted theater
in Beirut I may remember or I may forget
the last act—only because
the play was so poorly written.

Chaos—

like a desperate war diary, the story
of the spectators' own urges, actors shredding their scripts
and hunting for the author among us, the witnesses
in our seats.

I say to the artist next to me: Don't draw your weapon,
wait...unless you're the playwright!

— No.

He asks me: Are you the playwright?

— No.

We sit fearfully. I tell him: Be a neutral hero
and avoid an obvious fate.

He responds: No hero dies honorably in the second
half. I'll wait and see. Maybe I'll edit one of the acts. Or I might revise
what iron has done to my brothers.

It's you then? I say.

You and I, he responds, are two masked authors, two witnesses
masked.

What do I have to do with this? I'm just a spectator!

He answers: There are no spectators at the door of an abyss and no one
is neutral here. You have to choose
your role at the end.

I say: But I am missing the beginning.
What is the beginning?

NOTHING MAKES ME HAPPY

—*translated by Zahi Khamis, Kim Jensen, and Fanny Howe*

“Nothing makes me happy,”
says a passenger on the bus.
Not the radio, not the morning papers,
Nor the castles on the hills.
I just want to cry.

Wait, the driver says.
Wait till we get to the station.
Then cry as much as you like.

A woman says, I'm like him.
Nothing makes me happy.
I took my son to my grave-site.
He liked it, and lay down to sleep.
He didn't even say goodbye.

A professor says, I'm the same.
Nothing makes me happy.
I studied archaeology
without finding anything of myself
in the stones. What am I?

The soldier says, me too.
Nothing makes me happy.
I attack a ghost who attacks me.

Get ready! the driver snaps.
We're arriving at our last stop.

They all shout: We want what
comes after that!
Keep driving!

But me? I say, let me off here.
I'm like them. Nothing makes me happy.
But I am tired
of traveling.

YOU SHALL BE FORGOTTEN AS IF YOU NEVER LIVED

—*translated by Zahi Khamis and Kim Jensen*

You shall be forgotten as if you never lived
like a sparrow's fall
like a deserted church, you'll be forgotten
a fleeting love
a flower at night, forgotten.

I belong to the road. Someone walked before me,
a figure whose visions created footprints to follow,
who scattered seeds of language, dropped hints,
and lit up the lyrical path.

You shall be forgotten as if you've never been
a person or a text...you will be forgotten.

I walk in the company of a vision.
Maybe I can add a twist to the eternal story,
for words rule me and I rule them. I am their form
and they are free transfigurations.
But whatever I say has already been said,
and a passing tomorrow awaits me. I am the king of echo,
no throne but the margins. And the road
is the way. Maybe the ancients forgot to describe
something in which I may stir a memory or feeling.

You shall be forgotten as if you've never been
a trace or a face in the news...you'll be forgotten.

I belong to the road...someone's footsteps
will follow me to my visions. Someone will recite poems

in praise of the gardens of exile
at the doorstep of home, free from worshipping yesterday,
free of my metaphors and language; and I will testify
that I am alive
and free
when I am forgotten!