

Between the Clouds

Anthology

Written by persons with disabilities

Published by:

AlManarah International Library

Between the Clouds

Anthology

Written by persons with disabilities

Arab version editor:

Eyad Barghouthy

Translated by:

Muna Abu Baker

English version editor:

Dalia Rosenfeld

All rights reserved © 2018

AlManarah International Library

www.arabcast.org

Contents

Introduction	07
The story of AlManarah International Library – Abbass Abbass	15
The Lead - Hanifah Suleiman	25
Nadia's Laughter - Juman Za'aroura	35
Unrepeatable Days - Shurouq Khatib	45
Bus Number One - Taghreed Abbas	55
The Bride - Hanan Hallouma	73
The Doctor - Jamal Masri	81
The Prescription! - Abbass Abbass	89
I Will Always Be by Your Side - Reem Ersheid	103
The Last Page - Eyad Bargouthy	117

Introduction

We write our own story

During the creative writing workshop led by the writer Eyad Barghouthy, my American friend Yechiel Bar-Chaim, who works as independent consultant for *Bader Philanthropies*, visited me at work. I introduced Yechiel to the group, and he was impressed by the participants who shared with him their dream of publishing their stories in an anthology by the end of the workshop. After a while Yechiel contacted me again asking me about the creative writing project. I told him that we did indeed publish the stories in an anthology in Arabic and that we were busy organizing and coordinating different symposiums and a launch event for the anthology. He was very impressed and noted that it would be interesting for non-Arabs to get a closer look at the Arab world through literature, not through

ordinary protagonists, but through protagonists who are also Arabs with disabilities. Yechiel was delighted to inform me that the *Bader Philanthropies* was interested in funding a translation of the anthology "*Between the Clouds*" into English.

We at AlManarah believe that creativity and literature are tools that can bridge cultures. The collection of stories in "*Between the Clouds*" may indeed revolve around Palestinian Arabs with disabilities; however, people everywhere, and of all backgrounds, can relate to the universal themes in these stories. By publishing this anthology in English, we call for equality and human dignity for all communities, including those with disabilities.

AlManarah developed this project to create a sphere in which persons with disabilities can celebrate their uniqueness and fulfill their potential. This pioneering creative writing workshop aimed to empower persons with disabilities by

enabling them to express themselves orally and in writing. The workshop also became a space for highlighting the pressing challenges persons with disabilities encounter, through creating a text that reflects these difficulties, a text that serves as a catharsis, or a voice that will articulate their thoughts and personal pain. This project is a continuation of a process that AlManarah launched many years ago when we put a special emphasis on creativity and arts as a path for empowering and strengthening persons with disabilities. Such was our project *a Needle and a Fine Thread* that showed off the acting skills of our adult group, and the play *What's Time* in which our children's group expressed its creativity. The creative writing workshop has proven that the shortest path for elevating the status of persons with disabilities, and for integrating them into society, is achieved by supporting and bringing their talents to light.

Every project has its leader, and we were very happy to choose the creative writer Eyad Barghouthy to conduct this workshop. Mr. Barghouthy guided every participant to identify their talent and met with the group members weekly, teaching them the basic creative writing tools while introducing them to literary works by famous persons with disabilities. Mr. Barghouthy helped each participant choose the literary style that suited the theme of their story, then put a special emphasis on composition, and putting to paper ideas and feelings that reflect how it is to live with a disability.

The stories are characterized by realism and humanism, without being prosaic or polemical. This unique anthology contains eight stories written by persons who stood up to their disabilities and succeeded in leaving a mark. Although I am the executive director of AlManarah, I changed hats to become an enthusiastic participant in this workshop, lending my own story to this publication.

To reach a wider audience, AlManarah in turn decided to perpetuate the stories by recording and disseminating them through the AlManarah International Library www.arabcast.org, as well as its smartphone application "*AlManarah Library*."

We decided to call this publication *Between the Clouds*, believing that life offers many challenges, just like clouds, and we as individuals must find our path between them to find hope, leading us to a better tomorrow.

Abbass Abbass

*Founder and Executive Director
of AlManarah Association*

**The story of AlManarah
International Library**

AlManarah International Library is considered to be the first Arabic library adapted to meet the needs of the blind and persons with disabilities in the Arab world. It specializes in publishing adapted audio and digital books, as well as books in Braille, by making them accessible via its online website www.arabcast.org and its free application for smartphones in 'itunes' and 'google play' named Almanarah Library.

AlManarah Association has put the cornerstone for AlManarah International Library, and it is the first Arab association based in Nazareth. AlManarah was founded in 2005 by a group of activists persons with disabilities who were interested in elevating their status in the Arab society. The establishment of AlManarah International Library is a result of their belief that persons with

disabilities are entitled to receive their all their natural rights as any other sector in society, including the right for education that is guaranteed by international conventions and local laws, as well as the right to making education and culture accessible in a manner consistent with the needs of persons with disabilities and their cultural heritage, in accordance to The International Convention on The Rights of Persons With Disabilities and the Marrakesh Treaty for making the reach for publications accessible for the blind or visually impaired persons or other persons with print disabilities accessible. (2013)

This project is a cultural bridge for thousands of persons with print disabilities in the Arab world. By entering the website of the Library, the user can listen to thousands of high-quality audio or digital publications for free, from various cultural genres in more than 30 categories, including novels, Arabic poetry, human development books,

education and children's literature, and other categories.

AlManarah International Library attempts to fill the gap represented by the lack of professional high-quality Arabic audio books available specifically for the blind, and for persons with print disabilities in general by making books and information accessible. AlManarah International Library aims to reach as many persons with print disabilities as possible, and to strengthen their knowledge with Arabic vocabulary, as well as vocabularies of other languages. It also aims to empower and develop their reading skills, whether it results in better academic achievement, or in building knowledge and taking advantage of their spare time, hoping it will strengthen their abilities and improve their inclusion in society, especially in the academies and in the labor market.

We are proud that AlManarah International Library includes up to date more than 3 million beneficiaries, with

more than 160,000 monthly logs, and approximately 100,000 registered members. Registration in the website is free but limited to people with print disabilities, as we require the provision of a formal medical document explaining the type of disability the user has in order to become an official member in the website and to be permitted to access the library and to listen to the recordings for free. AlManarah International Library has published up to date approximately 5,500 audio publications comprising 80,000 hours of professional and high-quality recording, read by leading Palestinian and Arab voice artists and media personas. Following the recording, all books are made available for the blind and for persons with print disabilities, however, some books are made available for all registered members depending on approval of the writer for mass dissemination, or as a result of the absence of copyrights. The registration of thousands of users to the library has caused enthusiasm towards this project

among various Arab local groups interested in supporting and developing this project, especially professional readers and media persons and writers. It is worth mentioning that AlManarah Association has given the "Friend of AlManarah Library" medal to the most famous Palestinian writers, including the Internationally recognized Palestinian writer Ibrahim Nasrallah, and the international Israeli novelist Amos Oz.

AlManarah International Library's unprecedented success has elevated AlManarah Association's status, and made its impact and activity international par excellence, as it targets persons with disabilities in Israel, the Arab world and worldwide. It makes some of its publications accessible for the Arab audience at large. When checking Amazon's online ranking website www.alex.com, we find that AlManarah International Library website ranking (www.arabcast.org) is number 94,463 worldwide, and 1,864 in Egypt.

In May 2017, AlManarah's International Library won the prestigious Mohammed Bin Rashid Arabic Language Award (Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates) for its outstanding contribution towards the promotion of a reading culture in Arabic and facilitating access to worlds of knowledge. The Mohammed Bin Rashid Arabic Language Award is considered the highest award given in appreciation of the efforts of the Arabic language individuals and organizations, and is part of the initiatives launched by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, to promote, disseminate, and facilitate learning and teaching of the Arabic language, in addition to enhancing the status of the Arabic language and encouraging those who aim to nourish it.

In June 2017, AlManarah participated in the 10th Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) at the United Nations in New

York. AlManarah was represented by a distinguished delegation including Founder and Executive Director, Advocate Abbass Abbass; Board Member, Journalist and TV Presenter, Ruba Warwar; International Development Coordinator from Greece, Ms. Despoina Papadopoulou; and Dr. Jim Posner from the United States, a friend and supporter of AlManarah. It should be mentioned that participation in the conference represented a significant milestone for AlManarah's international activity, especially after AlManarah gained the status of Special Consultant to the United Nations and was elected to serve as a member of the international Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in mid 2016. AlManarah's participation in the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD also marked an historical event by being the only Arab organization from Israel and across the globe, to initiate a side-event at the conference, which was titled: Sharing the successful story of AlManarah's

International Library, the first one in the Arab world.

On February 2018, AlManarah received the Zero Project Award for Innovative Practices and Policies, and presented the AlManarah International Library in the Zero Project Conference 2018 at the United Nations facilities in Vienna.

We wish for AlManarah International Library to continue serving as a lighthouse for mankind and all of society. May its activities and accomplishments be a beacon of inspiration.

The Lead

By: Hanifah Suleiman

I met her by chance at a certain moment in time. I met her on the second day of a creative writing workshop, which was a dream of mine firmly entrenched in the folds of my mind and a corner of my heart.

A laugh burst from her delicate face when I met her by chance; Salma. She hugged me and asked me how I was; I answered that I was looking for a lead for a story that would reach readers' hearts. I asked her how she was, and she answered:

- I am your lead. Write my story and remove this thorn stuck deep in my soul.

Fate had sent me Salma and her sympathy. I no longer had ideas, nor could I write anything worthy. Our next

workshop was approaching, and my paper was still blank. Salma and I agreed to meet for a writing session so I could take the first step to fulfill my dream, a dream that was becoming a reality right before my eyes.

The day had arrived. She hosted me in her home and led me to her room. On the wall hung a picture of her with her father and a picture of her family, her graduation diploma, a letter of gratitude that was given to her father by the nurse, and leftover stickers from her childhood. It was my task, as a writer, to investigate every detail related to my protagonist, and my protagonist opened the door to her world wide open. How lucky was I?!

After a few silent moments, I asked a general question as an icebreaker, hoping to delve into her life and to know more about her experience. Any word could be a conversation starter.

- You see, I spend my time between work and home. Work is fun,

but hard. I work at an HMO answering the phone and providing information to people regarding their medical rights, and schedule appointments for them to see specialists.

She was keen to talk about work and told me the difference between polite and rude patients, and how she dealt with each kind. This was not what I had come to listen to, but I nodded my head and waited for the right moment to change the subject.

The door of her room was cracked open, her father looking in on us from the other side. She apologized to me and ran towards him to give him a kiss and ask if he needed any help. He whispered something in her ear. I had a feeling it was not a convenient time for her to have a conversation, and despite her urging me to stay, I decided to leave. I promised to keep in touch and walked home feeling I had spent my time in vain.

I called her repeatedly, but she did not answer. Our next workshop was getting closer, and my paper was still white. I had not managed to learn anything about her story that was worth recording. What would I write? Since she didn't keep her promise, should it be fiction? It was my right as a writer—I would decide how and when her body was burned. I would also imagine her sense of solitude when she was back in school, and describe the sneering looks people gave her and their vicious laughter, or even their annoying pity, in the street, on the bus, and in public places. I would have a scene about how hard the surgeries she had undergone were, and another about her father's love and care. I would imagine all this myself, her disappearance would not prevent me from writing the story that would make me famous. I would develop round and surprising characters and have a dramatic tone and interesting events and a surprising ending.

Just before I changed her life events as I saw fit, she called me. We agreed to meet as soon as possible.

We met again. After hesitating for a few moments, she said:

- I don't want you to write my story.

I was surprised.

- Why?

- Because you reminded me of that little girl in school, she had a beautiful smile while she was walking toward me, and I was very lonely and miserable. With every step she took, my heart danced, but when she was near me she drew boldly close, gazed at me and asked: "What's wrong with your face? How did it get like that?" All I wanted her to ask me was if I wanted to play with her. I do not want to retrieve my difficult life story, I worked very hard to forget it, and today I have many friends and colleagues

after those lonely and painful years!
Please excuse me.

I was annoyed by her decision, but it was OK, I would not nag her. I could understand how deeply her burned face had hurt her. I wanted to let her go, it looked as if she would not be the lead for my story.

- Just before you leave, my friend, I have a question that bugs me and I need an answer to: How can burns and scars I got when I was five months old, when fire took hold of my body because my family was distracted and did not pay attention to me, remain a stain on me my entire life? Why does a person suffer from his disability forever, to be deprived of what life has to offer?

Her question threw me back to my own life. I suffered a lot because of my own disability that had paralyzed the right side of my body. It seemed that in her story, I was looking for myself, to further

understand my own story, and to realize the depth of human beings; and that is the essence of literature, as I understood from the workshop.

Nadia's Laughter

By: Juman Za'aroura

(1)

Their eyes met on an early Saturday morning in May near the path leading to the stud farm. The sky was clear, as if it was telling the story of purple flowers, and butterflies were flying around them as if they felt how happy they were for meeting.

Nadia wrote in her diary that day: "I have many questions about existence, maturity and love, and about the hope that penetrates through the holes in my pain. He sees me as beautiful, knowing how white my heart is. He likes the way I talk and feels my soul and courage. His eyes can answer many of my questions but can also raise new ones."

In the sand she wrote the letters H-O-P-E before leaving him, and kissed the forehead of Nour, the horse which she

could not see, the same horse that Ahed told her looked like her. Then, she left.

(2)

The first time she saw a picture of him was in April. He was wearing a blue shirt and tenderly holding a six-year-old girl, or maybe younger. She had a shining smile. She looked a lot like her father. When she saw the picture, she became overwhelmed with memories. She had the same picture with her own father when she was six years old, her father also wearing a blue shirt. Who was this guy holding the little girl and pushing fear away from her? It was not her father. It is Ahed, they told her immediately.

She wrote in her diary that day: "I fear my father will fade away with time. I am no longer a little girl, and he is growing old. I recently understood that I am not a part of his body. I am starting to fear losing his big portion of my heart, and no longer being a little girl in his eyes. He is

my hope, my teacher, my assistant and my doctor. He is my address, my security, he is the gifts I receive for no reason, he is the time that I have left, that I had. I am afraid he will let go of my hand that he has been holding ever since I was a little girl, guiding my slow and faltering steps. I am afraid he will go away and not return."

(3)

He said "hi." In return, she laughed a stunning laughter, so stunning that he almost crashed his car into a nearby electricity pole. He called her, and they talked for a while.

Love is a natural thing in spring. Love is stronger and deeper than a laugh and a momentary joy, it is way happier than April, and crueller than separation or sunset. He restored meaning to her life and she gave a new style to his. He thought of her for hours, she banished his boredom and laughed a mesmerizing laughter that perplexed him.

He starts his days wondering how Nadia is doing, right after he wakes up to pray at dawn, and just before he rides his horse in the stud farm near his house. His name appears on her mobile screen at six o'clock in the evening after he gets back from work, where he fixes up houses that people trust him to turn into their dream house. He calls her, eager to hear her voice while secretly smiling. These are moments of excitement, joy, spontaneity, and sincerity. She hears the beats of his heart, and feels as if she is floating from happiness.

She wrote about him in her diary: "I was surprised by his interest in many things. He likes to meditate and is very kind, so kind that he wonders about birds and people and the sea. He looks for the truth in the Quran and history books, and sets aside time to explain to me things I do not know. He has added layers to my life which I peel back to ask: *“How does God love us? How can we know that God is near us?”*

She had always loved God, but she started to feel that God was around her only following Ahed's entrance into her life. God is in every emotion and above every emotion. God can see her heart and her thoughts.

(4)

"Will you work with me in my new restaurant?" She knew that Ahed was planning to open a restaurant in his village to expand his business. She was confused, but only for a short while. She was planning to tell him about her real condition, aside from her laughter that mesmerized him and attracted him to her. When they spoke in the evening, she told him about her slow stumbling steps, about how hard it was to get accepted for a job despite her achievements over the past 26 years.

He listened and suggested a job that was not waiting tables in his new restaurant. Her life made him curious, so

he asked her many questions. She told him how her two friends, her crutches, accompanied her night and day, and helped her, on public transportation, get from one place to another. She also told him how she had completed her education, thus fulfilling one of her dreams. Nadia's talk was so loving and beautiful, and when she talked about herself, she cried from happiness. He listened to her and asked her a sad question; then his voice faded away.

(5)

June. Today is the opening of Ahed's restaurant. She remembers that Ahed told her the opening date back then in May when they had met, but he did not remind her of the event. She was overwhelmed with happiness and smiled: "Today, I will meet him again." She put on perfume and wore a black dress and white pearls, grabbed her crutches and went to see him.

She entered the restaurant slowly as people gathered holding bouquets to congratulate him and wish him success. She heard his laughter and drew towards him while laughing charmingly, but he pulled away from her laughter and disappeared into the crowd. He left her in the middle of the restaurant, her crutches - her only companion. He left in June, ending a short spring and ending her childhood.

She did not write a single word in her diary that day; her laughter was the whole story.

Unrepeatable Days

By: Shurouq Khatib

That evening, I brought down the packed luggage that would accompany me to a new stage in my life, and got into the car with my father and mother, heading to the Central Bus Station in Afula. They did not speak to me the whole way, nor I to them. I would be parting from them for the first time in my life.

My father unloaded the bags from the trunk of the car, slung my school bag over his shoulder and pulled the big suitcase. In his other hand, he held an almost bursting bag that my mother had overstuffed.

- No need, Father, I will manage alone.

I took the bags from him and started walking faster than usual.

- But dear...

He cried, and I ignored him, and he fell silent. I heard the car door slam, then

the engine roar as the car took off and I disappeared into the security line.

Barely able to handle the heavy luggage, I searched for the bus terminal that would take me to Jerusalem. Every time I asked a passer-by where the terminal was, their answer was a gesture or a signal that I could not see. Others answered with unnecessary pity and sympathy. I reached the terminal that would take me to a new stage of my life, but not before colliding with several iron barriers, humans and second thoughts.

I reached the bus with my bags, only to keep bumping into people and things. It was difficult for me to put my luggage in the baggage compartment, because I was afraid I would not recognize it after it got mixed together with the luggage of other travelers taking the bus to reach their dreams and future battles, just like me. I stood next to the driver. Where was my ticket? Which one was it of all these tickets? Oh God, how would I find it? A woman passenger standing behind me in line shouted:

- Come on, what's taking you so long?!

I took a seat next to the driver and put my bags aside. I searched for the ticket while my mobile phone was ringing. I ignored the ring until I finally found the ticket and handed it to the driver with a big smile of relief.

I replied to the worried messages my parents had sent me. "I am on my way to Jerusalem, everything is all right." Two hours of travel and thinking lay ahead of me. The bus was dark, and the sounds and smells were unfamiliar. I was alone, my bags piled up next to me, and I did not know everything they contained, as I headed into the unknown. How will I manage? How will I get to the lecture hall? How will I live in a city far away from my parents? I was used to not worrying about anything because they always surrounded me with love and compassion, how would I separate from them now? They even used to help me to eat and drink! Who will hold my hand to

cross the street safely? Did I rush into this independence?

The driver declared that we had reached the Central Bus Station in Jerusalem. My queries stopped with the stopping of the bus. I called my friend to inform her that I had arrived, so she could come and escort me to the dorms, because I did not know anything about this unfamiliar place. I was surprised when she answered saying that she was waiting for me in the bus station and would try to find me when I got off. Could she really guide me when she could not see just like me? Could I one day guide someone on their new path?

I found her—or she found me, I am not sure which, what matters is that we met, finally. We hugged, and she felt that I was overwhelmed by everything happening around me, everything happening inside my soul. She said:

- You will get used to it; you too will get used to it.

- Are you sure? I asked her while clutching my bags as if they were going to break away from me.

- Of course! she answered confidently and added:

- We will be together, along with some other people that you will get to know. Let me help you with your bag.

I gave her the almost bursting one, the same one I did not know what my mother had stuffed with.

We reached the student dorms late at night. I put the bags on the floor; I would unpack them tomorrow if I decided to stay in this faraway and cold city. I threw myself on the bed, exhausted. It was not as comfortable as the one I had back home. I answered the new worried messages my parents had sent me: "I arrived in Jerusalem, tired, I am going to sleep." My friend was talking about life in Jerusalem, and I was pretending to listen and like it; but all I could think of was that I must find a place to study closer to my

home, as education in my case was not guaranteed to begin with. People *with* sight could not find work after their studies, so how could people like me, without?

When I woke up, my friend had already finished getting ready, but was moving slowly so as not to disturb me.

- Come on, wake up so you will not be late for the lecture.

I took out warm and beautiful clothes from my bag, because I knew that Jerusalem welcomed its newcomers with extreme cold and tension and selective love.

The campus was close to the dorms. My friend escorted me to the faculty building. I attended the first lecture. Everybody was new and felt alienated just like me, and the lecturers were busy talking about the course schedule, using long phrases I could not pronounce correctly at first.

I met with my friend again at an afternoon lecture in philosophy about life

and death. I was tired from yesterday's journey and became hungry from the strange talk. The lecture was really engaging, but I could no longer bear the fatigue, so I suggested that we leave. My friend agreed, but we took the wrong exit, and found ourselves in a different room. We fumbled around until we entered a room meant for air-conditioning engines. When we realized this, we laughed out loud while stuck inside, not knowing how to escape this embarrassing situation, because the hall was full with students, and the lecturer was tough and serious. I went out alone to find the exit, then came back to the air-conditioning room and escorted my friend outside, leaving our colleagues laughing. Even the lecturer could not control himself, and laughed.

I laughed so hard that day that my stomach ached. When we reached the hidden garden between the stone buildings, my friend said:

- This is a day that will not repeat itself!

This sentence had a tremendous impact on my soul. Every day in our life is a day that will not repeat itself if we decide that it be so. There are days more memorable than others, just like my first day at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I may bump into something and fall, or lose my way, but I will always stand up straight and regain my bearings. Every day is a gift that will not be repeated.

Hunger and fatigue brought me back to my new home. First, I opened the bags and started unpacking my clothes to wear for the next few days, recognizing my clothes by touch, and putting them in my new wardrobe. From the almost bursting bag I took out the plates and spoons and forks that I would use for eating after long days at school. I also found my pillowcase, which I would smell every time I unpacked for my unrepeatable days.

Bus Number One

By: Taghreed Abbas

Suha jumped from her bed and rushed to slap the alarm clock that was ringing loudly in her bedroom. A few moments passed, then she heard the tick of Big Ben from the radio in the yard, and the BBC announcer reading the five o'clock morning news.

Since returning to her parents' house in Nazareth seven months ago after completing her studies in Jerusalem, she uncharacteristically did not rush towards her radio to listen to the news with her father about the Stone Intifada, which had broken out during her final year in Jerusalem: on December 8th, 1987, in Jabalia, escalating after an Israeli truck driver ran over a group of Palestinian workers at the "Erez" checkpoint; afterwards, it spread to all the Palestinian

towns, villages and refugee camps. These events, and the subsequent demonstrations and verbal quarrels between Arab and Jewish students on campus panicked her, a 21-year-old woman, living far away from her family.

Suha stood in front of her closet. The sound of the announcer pulled her towards the yard, but she resisted: "I will listen to the news later, I don't want to get upset, I have no time, I want to get ready." In two hours she would have an interview for a social worker position. She was overwhelmed with happiness because she was sure she would start working soon; as far as she knew, there was no other competitor for this position and no other applicant with a Bachelor's Degree in social work from the Hebrew University. She promised herself to excel in her work as she had done in her studies.

Suha shut her bedroom door. From the window the birds accompanied her like an orchestra while she sang "It is spring, and the weather is beautiful" and "Will the

successful raise his hand?" She knew that she looked pretty, because her sister had helped her choose her outfit for the interview.

Suha went out to the yard. Her father was a lawyer. He was in the yard getting ready to leave the house. Yesterday he had informed her that he must be in court in Haifa early in the morning, and would not be able to give her a ride to the interview. Just before leaving, her father said to her what he always did before exams, ever since she was a child: "Suha, I have faith in you, good luck!"

Her mother was in the kitchen preparing breakfast and lunch for her two little brothers, who were getting ready for school. Suha posed for her mother and asked her opinion. Her mother answered lovingly: "You look stunning, nothing is out of place!" She hugged her mother and said: "There you go, within a few days I will start my new job and you will miss me!"

She left her home for the bus station, walking extra carefully on the dirt path to avoid getting her polished shoes dirty. When she reached the paved part of the road she gently cleaned her shoes with her handkerchief and headed towards the station.

Thank God! Only a few people were waiting, which meant that bus number one, the only bus in town, was about to come. Suha took her seat in the first row and rehearsed what she was planning to say in the interview, and to the director. She knew what the same director had previously asked another applicant, but then she remembered her father's advice not to think of these questions before the interview—to think beyond that, to think about herself.

Suha was looking through the window of bus number one to the only main road in her town, trying to determine the features of the places that the bus was passing by. She always accompanied her mother when she roamed that street,

passing by its different stores, which she knew by heart. For example, Mr. Naim Elloulou's store, that had once been a cave, was the most amazing store in town. His goods were packed in cardboard boxes scattered around the store. You could find everything you needed here, from pomegranates for preparing Burbara, to bricks. Suha had always loved this store, especially the delicious candy made from sesame that she used to buy.

Bus number one continued on its route. When the passengers started to gather and push each other towards the door, Suha knew that they had reached the entrance to the city market. She covered her mouth with her hand and muttered silently: "Oh, how I miss the market! When I start working, I will visit the market a lot and will roam the shops with my mother like in the good old days. I wonder if the shop that used to sell cotton candy and amber apples is still open." Suha knew that she would need to get off the bus at the next station. She rose and

reached up, trying to get a hold of the bellcord, but it slipped away. Fortunately, another passenger pulled it at the same moment, and she was relieved. When the bus stopped, she got off slowly.

After checking the address with a passerby, she entered the building. The guard welcomed her and guided her to the waiting room, confirming that the director was waiting for her. After a few moments, a young woman approached her and introduced herself as the janitor. She gently shook Suha's hand and stepped closer to her: "Welcome, Ms. Ena'am is in the next room."

Suha was dazzled by the bright sunlight coming from the window behind the director's desk. Ms. Ena'am, the fifty-two year old director of the Department of Welfare for the past fourteen years, was leaning on her desk, which was covered with scattered papers and binders. After greeting Suha in a somewhat formal manner, she asked her to take a seat opposite her.

Suha sat down and tried to fix her eyes on Ms. Ena'am; confidently, she started talking about herself. As soon as she mentioned her bachelor's degree in social work, Ms. Ena'am interrupted her: "But you have a disability!" Suha trembled, but kept her eyes on the director. She was blushing, sweating and shivering. "Your vision...you cannot see well...this will prevent you from being able to work as a social worker!"

Suha wanted to scream, but she was suffocating, her voice trapped in her throat was betraying her for the first time. It was the same voice that used to be strong, forceful and attractive, expressing her thoughts and knowledge, causing everyone to admire her. That voice was silent now. She had used that voice to fluently read children's stories written with big letters that her father brought especially for her, or to thank her teachers who praised her for being a bright student who excelled more than her classmates, or to answer her middle-school principal

who called her up in front of all the students to declare that she had achieved the highest scores. It was the same voice that promised her high-school principal, who admired her strong personality and high scores in all subjects, that she would pursue higher education, the same voice that answered the most difficult questions the lecturers at the university presented her with. Her voice's echo in her mind eased the hardness of her visual impairment and of being far away from her family. In a matter of mere seconds, this voice was muted; it was muted.

Ms. Ena'am took a piece of paper from her desktop and asked Suha to read what was written on it. Suha figured it was handwritten, so she brought it closer to her face trying to read it, but her poor vision prevented her from reading the bad handwriting. The voice was muted once again, she blushed even more, her hands sweating. Ms. Ena'am repeated in a low provocative voice: "It's too hard, too hard. How will you read all the instructions the

ministry sends? Also, as you know, all the employees here are women, and they will surely laugh at you when they see that you have poor vision. Even the citizens that we serve will get mad when they know that the social worker who is responsible for their case cannot see well, and how exactly will you make house visits?"

The room became very silent, and Suha felt she was suffocating. As she rose to leave the room, Ms. Ena'am called after her: "I advise you to drop the idea of working, it is difficult, very difficult." Then Ms. Ena'am called the janitor and asked her to accompany Suha and help her down the stairs and out of the building very carefully. Holding her hand, the janitor walked next to Suha and whispered in her ear: "Don't worry, I am holding you tight, I have a relative who is blind, and every time he comes to the welfare department to pick up a check for his companion benefits, I help him down the stairs. I feel so sorry for him, he is twenty-three and his parents take his social

security payments. They even take the payment he deserves for a companion benefits. He told me that he does not have any money, and as if that is not enough, his parents do not take him anywhere because they feel ashamed of him." Suha did not react at all, and the janitor stared at her for a while, and then asked: "What's wrong? You have not said a word ever since you stepped out of the director's office. Is everything ok? What happened?" Suha left the janitor without saying a word.

On bus number one, Suha pulled herself together. She did not even notice the road. As soon as she reached her home, her mother hugged her, and she burst into tears in her arms. Her mother wiped her tearful eyes: "Don't worry, don't be sad. We will see what we can do when your father comes home, stop baby, don't cry." But she sobbed every time she remembered what Ms. Ena'am had told her, and when she remembered her own silence.

"You will call her first thing tomorrow morning, and tell her all the things you could not say in that meeting. I will stand by your side," her father said firmly when he came home late that day. She calmed down a little after hearing her father's words, but Ms. Ena'am's words kept echoing in her head all night, so she cried all night and could not sleep. At 9:30, the next morning, she called Ms. Ena'am:

- *Hello Ms. Ena'am, it is Suha, do you remember me?*

- *Of course I remember you, but I thought we were finished with that matter yesterday, I don't have anything further to say.*

- *But I do, and you must listen to me this time. I am still shocked by your cruel treatment of me and of the harsh things you said to me. You are a director in a welfare department, but you never realized that I completed my studies with excellence, and you judged me and decided that I cannot work without*

providing me with any chance to prove otherwise. I think your behavior is unjust and inhumane. I was particularly shocked that these words and behavior came from someone who holds an official position and is supposed to represent a profession that is based on sympathizing with, supporting and empowering the other. Unfortunately, you disregarded all the basic tenets of our profession. By the way, if the social workers who work in your department would make fun of me for my disability, they also are not fit to be social workers, and I would neither want to work with you nor with them.

She hung up the phone without waiting for Ms. Ena'am to reply.

Suha no longer listened to the news with her father every morning, she even stopped jogging every evening with her friends. She stayed in her room most of the day, and complained about pressure in her chest. She slept and ate less and less, and her face became pale.

"Suha, the district welfare unit needs a social worker, send them your resume," her father said and gave her the address.

"I don't want to fail again," she said and tried to hide her face. Her father then told her stories of failure, defeat and injustice that many famous figures had gone through, but who were persistent and determined to overcome these hardships, such as Einstein who was thought to be dumb, and Abdul Haleem Hafiz, the famous Egyptian singer, when started to sing, was pelted with tomatoes. Before leaving the room, her father recited the poet Al Motanabi's poet's famous lines:

Demands are not achieved by only wishing

But must be conquered

An achievement can never be

Too hard to gain

If you are brave enough to demand it

Conquering her fear, Suha sent her resume, and even went for an interview. She did not take bus number one this time, as life has many routes. Four other candidates applied for the same job. Suha was very confident in the interview and answered all the questions smoothly. Ms. Jihan, the director of the district unit, invited Suha for another interview two days later. As soon as Suha entered her office, Ms. Jihan welcomed her warmly and said: " I called you back because I wanted to tell you how much I admire you and to congratulate you myself. We chose you over the four other candidates to work with us in the district unit." Suha's heart was pounding, her body trembling as she heard Ms. Jihan's words; but she asked hesitantly: "What about my poor vision?" Ms. Jihan answered: "I checked your condition and I think that you have many nice qualities that I did not find in the others."

Suha left Ms. Jihan's office overwhelmed with a happiness she had

not felt for the past five months. Her limbs dancing uncontrollably, she grabbed the banister and went down the stairs and out the building. As she took the first step, she saw her father. She nodded her head, beaming. He held her shaking hand, and excitedly recited the famous Lebanese poet Khalil Mutran:

Be determined and work hard

If you embark on your journey do not stop

*Be patient and persevere and success will be
yours*

*The successful is not he who aspires for his
wishes*

But he who is blessed with persistence.

The Bride

By: Hanan Hallouma

When Mariam, the hairdresser, turned off the hair dryer she was aiming at Amal's head in order to answer the ringing phone, Amal heard a customer who was waiting for her turn, saying to another customer:

- No, they broke up and are no longer engaged!

Why? What's the matter? They were madly in love with each other, said another customer sitting next to her.

- Well dear, it turns out her sister is blind, I didn't know that, I only saw her when we first visited them!

- But the bride is fine! She is very beautiful and educated and holds a respectful job.

- Even so, I don't want to have people with disabilities in my home.

Mariam noticed that Amal's facial expression had changed while listening to this conversation. She also noticed that Amal's mother was very embarrassed and was looking at the reflection of her daughter sitting atop the hairdresser's tall chair. Mariam grabbed the hair dryer once again and turned it on to stop this chatter from reaching the ears of Amal, who now seemed very annoyed.

Mariam took a hairbrush and combed Amal's hair. It was May 9th, and Amal was celebrating her birthday. Mariam was almost done. It was not a good time to argue; it could anger the owner of the salon, who was very careful not to hurt the feelings of her customers, and always sought to provide them with the best service. Nevertheless, the customer's voice managed to break through the high pitch of the hair dryer, and she heard her "correcting" the other customer and calling the bride "very rude" for saying: "I wish for my children to be like my sister!" So she forbade her son from seeing that girl.

"Very good," said Mariam after turning the hair dryer off while untying the salon robe Amal was wearing.

- *Thanks, dear, I care very much for my son, answered the customer confidently.*

- *No, I meant that girl's answer to you was very good.*

The customer was surprised to hear what Mariam had said. The owner of the salon, who was preparing the seat for another customer, scolded Mariam to silence her: "Mariam!"

- *No, excuse me, isn't it enough that our society does not approve of people with disabilities getting married? You also want to prevent their families from marrying? Their brothers and sisters? Now I get why people who have children with disabilities feel ashamed of them or neglect them and forget about them after they put them in institutions. I used to work in such an institution. Parents did*

not visit their children for months, but when they got paid for every visit, they couldn't wait to come again.

- Nothing is more important to me than my son, I am not willing to let him be in such a position! Those with disabilities or who are at risk of being disabled should not get married! said the other customer.

Amal's mother came closer to her daughter to help her down from the tall chair. She turned Amal towards her, kissed her and said:

- You look stunning, God bless you, you look like a bride!

The customer noticed that Amal was vision-impaired and felt very embarrassed; she looked the other way.

- And nothing is more important than my daughter, said Amal's mother *to the customer.*

- I wish all parents were like you, said Mariam, *who was*

embarrassed by this situation even more than the customer.

Amal thanked Mariam and the owner of the salon, and just before leaving the place, she turned to the customer and said:

- By the way, a disability is not always physical, there is a kind of disability that disables your soul.

The Doctor

By: Jamal Masri

While I was waiting for my appointment at the doctor's office, my wife, who was sitting next to me, asked me whether I wanted some water. Although I was very thirsty, I didn't reply.

I had been waiting for this appointment for many weeks. I was finally going to meet an Arab doctor who could understand me, and I him. On my last visit, they had me see a doctor who did not speak Arabic. She asked me the reason I had come to her; in the few Hebrew words I knew, I tried to explain the problem I was suffering from.

When my wife also wanted to speak, she burst into tears like a heavy rain. With tears in her own eyes, the doctor spoke to her gently and said that she felt our pain and understood the hardships that we were

facing, but thought that it would be better if I was treated by a psychologist who spoke my language.

The secretary asked me to enter the doctor's office; it was my turn. With one hand, my wife helped me get up, and in the other she held my crutches.

He asked me:

- What happened to you?
- I was in the workshop. My supervisor asked me to stand in a certain place and to hold something, then someone shouted: Watch out!
- What kind of work did you do?
- I was a builder.
- Of course you would hurt yourself in a construction site, if you had tried harder in school and gotten yourself a diploma, nothing would have happened.

I could not believe what I was hearing. My wife tried to interrupt and said:

- But, Doctor..."

He silenced her and asked her not to speak again.

He said to me:

- All right, continue!

But he did not even look at me, he was staring at his mobile phone and typing on the computer as if nobody was with him in the room.

- I tried to jump from the third floor.

- Brother, if you want to commit suicide, just do it. What would the world lose? Who is holding you back? Get out and just throw yourself in front of a moving car and that's it!

My wife stood up angrily. While grabbing my elbow to help me out of the room, she said:

- *I* am holding him back, and so are his kids. Do not think you are great, because God is greater.

I stood up with difficulty and said:

- I am not educated, but I have something better than education; I have manners, Doctor!

To get me out of the clinic, my wife helped me walk at a slow pace, as she has done ever since I was injured at work. I was not quick enough to escape a heavy load that fell on me from a high floor at the construction site. "Watch out!" called the supervisor, but my leg was already stuck in something I could not recognize, and crushed. Back then I did not realize how serious the injury was. My life partner was by my side the whole time I was hospitalized. She was also there when the doctor told me that I would never be able to work again. I felt his words were heavier than that load, felt crushed a second time. I was a vigorous worker, a father who wanted his children to have a better life than his, who wanted to provide for their every need. I would not work again, not even be able to walk. I passed out several times that day, and my wife

was the first thing I saw every time I regained my consciousness.

My wife was also by my side when we went to the wedding of a relative. She saw me from afar when I sat down and took in everyone around me working and humming like bees, holding trays of rice and drinks and sweets, welcoming the guests and walking them to their seats. I tried to help them, but my body betrayed me, so they asked me to return to my seat. Everyone distanced themselves from me, even those I was closest to. I couldn't bear to be like this, death would have been easier. When we came back home, I tried to jump from the third floor balcony, but they held me back. The next day I took a huge amount of pills. My wife begged me to be patient and keep faith in God, and she took me to a psychiatrist.

Just before we left the clinic I said to her: "I'd like some water, dear." She looked at me, her eyes shining with hesitant tears. She helped me sit on a chair

and went to fetch some water. I drank half the glass and gave her the other half.

- *As long as you are by my side, I will get better.*

The Prescription!

By: Abbass Abbass

Our youngest has made us proud!" said my father in a resonant happy voice at the end of a small party my family had thrown for me to celebrate my score on the "psychometric" exam. However, when I told my father I was still unsure what to study at the university, he drew near to me and said:

Abass, you know all your brothers and sisters wished they could study law, but the circumstances back then prevented them from fulfilling their dreams. However, you can make it, and because you are living today in my democracy, I want you to choose between two subjects for your higher studies: either law or law school.

And he laughed.

A few months before the first academic year of law school at the Hebrew University, I received a letter from the Department of Welfare in Nazareth informing me that I was eligible for a Blind Certificate, because my vision had severely deteriorated. Great! I would receive a new certificate right after undergoing a clinical test to confirm my poor vision.

When I entered Dr. Nader's clinic accompanied by my mother, I tried to examine the place with what was left of my vision. I saw a newspaper lying on the table, but I couldn't read the headlines. I also detected a smell that was neither bad nor good, but similar to what I smelled when I had gone to the hospital for some medical tests. (Now I recognize places by their smell.)

After a short while, I heard my name being called, so I entered the doctor's office with the help of my mother. The doctor welcomed us apathetically, without saying much, and led me to an eye exam

machine. I put my head in the designated place, and the doctor held a small flashlight and stared into my eye. I smelled the doctor then, and didn't like it. Shortly afterwards, he stood up and said:

- You suffer from the worst eye disease, called Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP); it severely weakens the vision, and sometimes causes total blindness. This means that you have poor vision...

Doctor, I know.

The doctor sat behind his desk, and I figured that he was writing down the results of the medical exam. While he was busy writing he approached me and asked:

- What are your plans for the future?

- I will start my law studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem next month; I want to become a lawyer!

- Whaaaaaaat? Whaaaaaaat? You want to study law in

Jerusalem? Son, you cannot see fifteen centimeters in front of you, people like you should sit in a corner at home and listen to the radio all day.

It was as if the roof of the clinic had been reduced to rubble and fallen on my head. I was speechless and shocked. When my mother and I left the clinic, my mother burst into tears and said:

- What have I done to deserve this?!

Amidst this emotional storm of extreme sorrow and anger, a hidden volcanic strength exploded in my veins and pushed me to hold my mother, kiss her and say to her confidently:

- I promise you, Mother, one day you will be proud of me! Don't feel sorry, I will not follow this doctor's prescription!

I did not follow the doctor's prescription. I did not sit in a corner of the

house, I did not even have enough time to listen to the radio. I moved to Jerusalem and studied law. Despite all the challenges that faced me, I received a bachelor's degree in law, which paved the way for my master's degree in human rights, followed by a master's degree in business administration.

My parents urged me to continue my academic career and get a doctorate, but I decided to shape my own fate; I founded the "AlManarah Association," believing that self-reliance and the advancement of people with disabilities in the Arab society to which I belonged was the best recipe for change and influence. "AlManarah" saw unprecedented achievements, foremost of which was creating a quiet revolution that did away with the patriarchal treatment of, and pity toward, people with disabilities. Within a few years, this young and ambitious organization was up and running.

Five successful years after establishing "AlManarah," I was chosen

as the best social entrepreneur by the "Ashoka – Innovators for the Public" organization, which granted us global recognition as a model to follow, and an example for using self-reliance as a means to create local and international impact. After winning this award, I was invited to an international conference for social entrepreneurs in San Francisco, in May 2010.

When I returned from this successful visit to the United States, I barely had time to rest, because I was busy preparing for "AlManarah's" fifth anniversary, which we decided to turn into a huge celebration. The celebration was unique and emotional, and attended by a large audience. When I stood to give my welcome speech, I approached my mother and said:

- Do you remember the pledge I made, promising that you would be proud of me one day? I hope that I have fulfilled my promise.

My words moved hundreds of guests in the crowd, and led to a standing ovation. Everyone became very emotional when they saw my mother and her tears of joy. I could not see her crying, but I smelled her tears. I remember the smell of her tears, and I knew her voice very well. From her voice, I could discern her mood: she was very happy, full of pride and victory.

After a week or so following that joyful celebration, I received a phone call from my friend and former teacher, Suhel Esawi, who also became "AlManarah's" insurance agent. He informed me that the insurance company needed me to urgently issue a new medical report detailing how severe my vision impairment was, and informed me that he had already scheduled an appointment at the doctor's clinic.

As I entered Suhel's car with my loyal employee and friend Muhammad to go to the clinic, I was curious to know the name of the doctor. When Suhel said proudly

that it was the very well-known Dr. Nader, I cried:

- What?! Of all the doctors in the world, couldn't you find one whose prescription isn't still echoing in my head and that I will never forget as long as I live?

Suhel was understanding; when he parked the car, he said:

- This is your chance, dear, to get rid of your unfinished business.

I entered the clinic with the help of Muhammad. My body was trembling with excitement, and after a short while, I heard a voice calling:

Abbass is an angry lion if war inflames

The leftovers are a blessing

And the spring is generous

(From a poem to Abu Nawas)

What? It was the doctor calling me with this unexpected, lyrical invitation.

I preferred to meet the doctor alone, so I asked Muhammad to wait for me outside, and be alert and ready to call the emergency services if needed: the police or the fire department.

Muhammad accompanied me to the door of the doctor's office. I walked heavily, carrying a storm of contradicting emotions inside me, throwing me back to the past when I had kept my silence at the doctor's office over a decade ago, and providing me with confidence derived from my achievements in the past decade.

I shook hands with the doctor. He regarded me with apathy just as he had done many years ago. And I, I smelled that same stench. While he was busy doing his routine checkup, I felt like a lion ready to pounce on his prey.

I took the doctor by surprise and said:

- There is this person, Doctor, who visited your clinic many years ago, and you were about to destroy his future, but he tore up your un-medical prescription and refused to sit in the corner listening to the radio. He received a higher education and currently is the director of a successful organization serving people with disabilities, called "AlManarah." He just came back from America where he was awarded international prizes and great recognition!

- Who is this person? I am intrigued to know.

- Me!

The doctor fell silent and was very embarrassed. After a long silent moment, I approached him.

- I forgive you, Doctor, but beware of making the same mistake with someone else!

The doctor was astonished. I asked him to call in my friend Muhammad. When Muhammad entered I asked him to capture this historical moment by taking a picture of me with Dr. Nader, so that time would freeze at that exact moment, and this chapter would be closed with a feeling of victory and ecstasy. But quick to open a new chapter, I asked the doctor to become an activist in "AlManarah" and offer lectures about eye diseases to parents of children with visual disabilities.

**I Will Always Be by
Your Side**

By: Reem Ersheid

Waiting

It was a rainy day, as if this unstoppable rain were following me to rain over my head; how to escape? Or perhaps it was guiding me? I tried unsuccessfully to escape it. I waited for a little while until the rain stopped following me so I could reach my destination.

The first visit

When I saw him enter my room in the hospital, his shining light lit up the darkness in my heart. A heavy tear fell from his eye onto my cheek when he came closer to kiss and hug me. I wiped his tear with my hands that were still shaking from the anesthesia, removed the oxygen mask and smiled.

- *Do not worry Dad, I will be all right.*

- *Put the mask back on and you will be all right.*

He sat by my side on the bed. He looked at me, quietly searching for signs of life in my eyes, which had started to see darkness ever since that day. I was drowsy, but he sat by my side all the time.

My mobile rang. I brought the screen closer to my eyes.

- *How are you sister?*

- *I am fine.*

- *We will visit you tomorrow.*

- *No need, I have everything right here. You don't need to come after work, it is a long distance and by the time you arrive it will be late. They will not let you stay for more than a few minutes.*

- *But sister...*

- *Honestly, I am fine. I will be discharged from the hospital in two*

days. Your wife is pregnant, and I don't want her to get tired. Video call me so I can be sure you are OK and you can see for yourselves that I am fine. I am not alone here.

- *Who is with you?*
- *I am fine, I will be ok.*
- *Who is with you?*

When I ended the conversation without answering his question, my father and I laughed so hard that I was afraid the patient lying next to me would hear us and be annoyed, so I whispered to my father:

- You planted us in good soil. You have taught us what love is all about.

- But I never expressed my love to you.

- We felt your love Dad.

He hugged and kissed me as never before, a kiss of bliss. Another tear dropped, but this time I did not wipe it.

- *Reem, Reem, Reem... Why aren't you answering?*

I did not notice the nurse as she entered to talk to me, pushing a cart full of medicines and medical equipment and repeated questions. She handed me the dose to take in the evening, but she was not surprised that my mind was wandering. She measured my blood pressure and wrote the results on a large paper sheet hung on the front end of my bed, as she was glaring at me over her eyeglasses. I could barely see her.

- *Do you need anything else, Reem?*

I nodded my head and managed to crack a smile, saying I didn't need anything. The nurse grabbed the bell, put it near me and said:

- *If you need anything just press the bell and I will come at once!*

- *Thank you for being so kind,
I will be all right.*

She switched the lights off and left the room. My father sat next to me on a chair that was put there for friends and family to sleep on, next to the patient.

- *You don't need to stay with me. Go home and get some rest, I am not a child anymore.*

- *I will always be by your side, even when you're a grumpy ninety-year-old lady.*

I laughed out loud, I couldn't control myself. The nurse came back, turned on a light and asked me why was I laughing, and if I needed anything.

- *No, I have everything I need right here.*

The nurse switched the light back off and left the room puzzled.

- *I wish Mom was here with us.*

I whispered in his ear again, so I would not laugh, and moved closer to him. A tear was dangling in his eye, so I moved even closer and put my arms around him.

If I did not love my mother I would have thought I had *Electra Syndrome* which I learned about in my psychology studies. I was afraid I had this syndrome; however, my condition was different. There was no psychologist in the world that could know what was in that box of mine, which I hide carefully and never speak about. Both my father and my mother are the light of my life.

- *Her illness slowly gnawed away at her body. She was relieved in the end... honestly.*

- *She too will surely come to visit you one day.*

I fell asleep.

Four months later

The doctor said:

- *There is high pressure in her skull. This problem is treatable, but we need to do another surgery so her condition will not worsen.*

The operating room, over and over again. My illness has blinded me! I can see only shadows. All I ever hear is my father's husky cry when he visits.

While the doctor assured me that if I took my meds every morning and every evening, and if I made sure to do periodic tests then everything would be all right, I was calculating in my head how old my mother was when she died? How much time did I have until I reached her age? I want to go too, I am tired. I wished I could stop the short lecture the doctor was giving me to remind him that my mother too had made sure to take her meds every morning, afternoon and night, but her illness did not leave her much time and

she was defeated at a young age. I wanted to scream in his face: "This medication is worthless, all I see in life is black darkness and damn redness. Getting used to this kind of life is mission impossible. How much time do I have?"

My father visited me in the evening. He entered the room and sat near me.

- *It's good that you came. I want to talk to you.*

I sat beside him as usual, put my head on his shoulder, and instantly burst into tears; my father was amazed to see me cry so hard.

- *What is wrong Reem?*

He called my name melodiously, and the singing of birds echoed in my heart.

- *I am tired, I am very tired, father. How much longer will I stay*

like this? I am sick of this life. I want to go to my mother.

He stood up, held me tight and cried with me. It was a crying hug, just like a raincloud raining tears to fill the universe. I tried to calm myself - to calm him. I removed his hands and wiped my tears while he continued crying restlessly.

- Dad, do not cry, please. I will try, I will bear it, don't worry.

I wiped his wet face with my hand and patted his silky hair to comfort him. It was the first time his cry scared me. I was worried about him because he never cried so feverishly; he rarely cried at all. Only when he lost my mother had I seen him like this. He said in a choking voice:

- Draw your life with your own colors so you will be able to see her again.

We both stopped crying and I fell asleep.

Mist

My mobile phone rang and startled me. I became conscious again as if I had been dreaming!

*- Where are you? He's here,
he's here!*

The joy in my brother's voice when he told me the news of the arrival of his firstborn was like none other. I rushed to the hospital. Let this raincloud pour rain over my head.

The entire family was in the waiting room, but my father was not there. I was anxious, he was late, what happened to him? His grandson is here, and he bears his name, oh God, he must be here for this moment. A nurse appeared holding a little baby in her hands to show us. Everybody rushed to see him, but I stayed by the window

waiting attentively for my father, waiting for him to appear from this rainy day mist and announce his arrival.

- Reem, come see the baby, he looks just like our father, may his soul rest in peace.

The Last Page

By: Eyad Bargouthy

After marking all the files, I dragged them to the body of the message, then pressed "send." The course has come to an end. The files will become an anthology within a few months. All those ideas I heard on the first day, last April, have bloomed, and their fruits were real stories.

When I released the stories from my computer, I was surprisingly saddened. It reminded me of the feeling I have every time I finish reading a novel or a story that I like, that I do not want to part from the characters or their world. Nevertheless, I turn the page in acceptance of the inevitability of the last page, consoling myself with the pictures and feelings that tumbled out from the book to fuse with me and become a part of me; then I put the book aside and sink into a new dream.

This spring, every sunny Saturday, I traveled from the place I live to the place where I was born and raised. The road was clear and smooth. My dream sat beside me during my road trip, talking to me like an old empathetic friend, completing what was unspoken in a state of worry and anxiety: "All that you want is to write your story, and other people's too." It continued: "And to help them in writing their own stories, because, simply, that is what you are all about."

I was thinking that the distance from me to myself had become shorter, because I had decided to do what I love on my day off. I was also thinking that I had needed to walk a long, complex and fun road, a road full of barriers, slopes, and beautiful scenery, traffic jams and new routes, just to realize that I was doing what I love, and to understand why I was so captivated by stories and convinced that we need to know how to write our story and those of other people, because when we write honestly about the experiences that shape

us, and the feelings that burn us, and the ideas that form us, and when we write about our loved ones and about hatred, then we understand ourselves and our lives better. Then we can rest and let others feel that they are not alone. When I write my story, I leave my body to latch onto language and people, from today, and from other times. So I remain, and we remain.

This spring I was anxious for the arrival of summer, as I was anticipating the arrival of a daughter I had longed for my entire life. While reading every sentence the participants wrote, I realized how crucial their fathers' role was in their own lives. This was not new to me, but I realized, as never before, how deep and great a father's role is. It must be timing and the accumulation of meanings and signs, and the human truth in its simplest manifestation, and I—I will probably be occupied with this subject for a long time...

The stories speak for themselves; I will not add another word. I released them after editing for publication, but I am not released from their impact, nor do I want to be.

Spring 2017