

The Dead Are Busy

Die Toten haben zu tun

الموتى مشغولون

Radio play by Mudar Alhaggi and Wael Kadour

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Taha (D/A): Am I a murderer or am I dead?

How can a dead man kill?

Perhaps a dead man is the most capable of killing?

Mira was dead before I killed her. Mira killed herself after I killed her. I can't kill.

If I were capable of killing, I might feel better now... I'm about to disappear... I have the choice: either wait for death, or bring it on prematurely by killing myself... I don't have the courage to kill myself... I can only leave myself... As I left Syria... As I left the children in Lebanon... ...as I left Mira... How I killed her...

2

Taha (D/A): When I came to Germany, I thought I was an expert in exile because I had a two-year exile experience from Lebanon ... I knew that I would need some time to settle down. And I knew it would take a long time... I also knew that I would become depressed... But apparently, after just one experience, you are not an expert in exile...

There were new things in Germany that I hadn't expected... The cold... The endless paperwork... The language... Every day I had to get a new form, so I left the house every day...

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And that's why I couldn't put my plan into practice: to have a few days of rest that would turn into a year of depression, and once I got over the depression, all I had to do was see

what I was doing with my life ... Every day I was forced to postpone the plan because I had to get out of the house. And when I realized that this situation was dragging on, I decided to change the plan and split my time. From 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Papers and paperwork and looking for a room... And from 6:00 p.m. to 12:00 p.m. depression... I followed the plan, but sometimes it got confused, for example when I got depressed and was outside the house, like at some authority. There were even times when the employees took pity on me because of my appearance while I was filling out the papers ... It also happened that I was at home during the period reserved for depression and had to interrupt it because I had to write an email or apply for a room that I had found on the Internet ... With the beginning of the German lessons it became impossible to separate the two states. They intermingled, so that I could neither be active nor depressed ... I became a refugee.

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Mira: Have you no friends here?

Taha: Yes, but everyone is busy with himself.

Mira: And your family?

Taha: I have no brothers or sisters, and my father died a long time ago. And my mother did not want to leave Syria. She still lives in the village with her siblings... Sometimes I can talk to her when her internet works.

Mira: I don't have many friends... My children took up all my time, they were my friends... They're not with me now... I live with my husband Toni and Arko, my dog. He is my friend.

Taha: Really? A dog is your friend?

Mira: What's so funny about this?

Taha: I don't like dogs...

Mira: Do you have a phobia?

Taha: Why phobia? I just don't like them.

Mira: Maybe you'll change your mind once you get around dogs.

Taha: You think I'm going to like the way they think?

Mira: Your jokes are funny.

Taha: Are you offended? I'm sorry.

Mira: No. You're just weird.

Taha: What's so funny about this?

Mira: I like to marvel at things and wonder. It is nice to be amazed about things.

Taha: I often feel that way here in Germany.

Mira: I rarely see it.

Taha: In Syria, before the revolution, I was like you, I was not surprised.

Afterwards, I was often astonished... But somehow different... Rather shocked... So that I adjusted accordingly, so that I didn't expect anything more... Like when you enjoy a film you watch. You don't know what's coming... But the difference is that you're in the film... You don't know what's going to happen, but you know that something will

happen... You put yourself at the mercy of the film... You give yourself over to the writer... and you wish time would pass without anything happening.

Mira: That's a bit much, isn't it?

Taha: The greatest amazement is when you watch yourself deal with it.

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Mira: My name is Mira. I live in a big flat with Toni and Arko. We have a spare room and are looking for a tenant. Do you want to live with us? As a guest or a tenant, as you like.

5

Taha: D/A.

My name is Taha, I am thirty-three years old, I come from Deraa in Syria. As long as my father lived, he was my world and for my father the world meant being a hero. Hero is the word I heard most often in my childhood, also during my puberty and as a young man until my father died. Of course I can't say exactly what "hero" means ... a great person ... a person who sacrifices himself for others ... a man who fights for his rights ... or maybe all of it together. My father died in 2004 and I cried a lot at his grave and promised him to be a hero. All the time I saw him in my dreams, sometimes he was doing well and that meant I kept my promise. And sometimes he was angry, and that meant that I had made a mistake, without him telling me which one.

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Mira: Are you married?

Taha: No, of course not. I would have told you.

Mira: Maybe so. Why would you tell me? Do you have a university degree?

Taha: Yes, in journalism.

Mira: Ok. What are you able to work?

Taha: What do you mean?

Mira: The question is clear.

Taha: Well, it's quite clear that I have a degree in journalism.

Mira: Well, you studied journalism, but that doesn't mean that you can't do something else. Maybe there's no work for you in journalism. Maybe they'll find another job for you, and you'll have to accept that.

Taha: Yeah, but I don't really want to work, I want to study.

Mira: Suit yourself... But then they won't pay you any money. Listen, either you take a German course or you find a job. Only then they'll take care of you. And if you can't find a job, they'll find you a job. So make up your mind.

Taha: Okay, I have experience with puppet theater. In Lebanon, I worked with children in a Syrian refugee camp. I taught them how to make puppets and how to play them and how to do performances.

Mira: Are you kidding? Stick to journalism. I know exactly how this works. All the artists here will tell you. You can't find work for them all.

Taha: All right. Photography maybe?

Mira: That works, but it's not such a big difference.

Taha: That's what I do. But I do everything.

Mira: How good is your English?

Taha: So so.

Mira: Can you work physically?

Taha: Depends. I can't carry heavy things. And I can't stand on my feet for long.

Mira: Okay.

Taha: Are we done?

Mira: These are the most important points. In the job centre they will ask you for more details.

Taha: Should I explain to them that I want to continue my studies?

Mira: You can explain to them what you want... It won't do you any good. You've finished your studies. Do you want to write a thesis?

Taha: No, I'm going to study acting.

Mira: No kidding?

Taha: Too big a thing, or what?

Mira: No, but do you have enough energy to start over?

Taha: I made this decision when I was on my way to Germany, actually that was exactly when I crossed the German border and realized that I had arrived ... All along the way I asked myself why we were torturing ourselves like this. For what? And whenever I came to this point, I thought of my dream of becoming an actor. I applied for acting school in

Damascus, but they didn't take me. So I studied journalism. But now I feel that I have the strength to try again.

Everything else would be a waste of time.

(Start Hamlet monologue in Arabic)

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Taha (D/A):

At the entrance examination in Damascus I played the Hamlet monologue. I put all I had into it. They said nothing, they just laughed. I decided never to return to that college again. I don't even know if they accepted me. Then I started to study journalism. I thought it was a profession for heroes. During the four years at the university I only learned one thing: There are no heroes in Syria. A journalist must tell people the truth, but in Syria it is different. No one can tell the truth. Maybe out of fear, maybe out of desperation. People know the truth anyway, what's the point of telling them? To make a difference? Whenever I told someone that we had to tell the truth to make a change, I was mocked. Like they were saying:

You're naive. Or: You don't understand the world you live in. And at best: You are still young and you still have a lot to learn to understand how life works in this country. As if I was from another planet... As if I was speaking another language... They made me a

victim. But I had to be a hero. Maybe a victim is a disappointed hero. Disappointed because nobody listens to him. Because he thinks boldly. Like Hamlet.

I am Hamlet.

It was all I could do in Syria... My father's visits in my dreams became rarer, his face paler each time. He was right, I had broken my promise.

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Taha (D/A):

The apartment of Toni and Mira was like the womb that had welcomed me into the foreign land. I felt safe, I felt trust, affection. Mira was always there for me when I needed support, with official papers, in the job centre, in the city and even when learning German. In this ideal atmosphere, the only thing missing was the answer to a question I didn't dare ask directly. There was a secret. Something strange in Mira's eyes ... A deep sadness that she could not hide, which is why she disappeared in her room for hours, sometimes even days. Just like I did in the first months after I left Syria. I remember burying myself in my room in Beirut and hoping that the world would forget me forever. Could it be that Mira hoped the same thing?

Mira. What was wrong with her?

What made her so irritable?

Where were the children?

And what was the constant tension between her and Toni, which also suddenly disappeared again?

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Privacy is sacred here in Germany, but my questions, which grew more and more from day to day, clouded the feeling of the new security. They almost destroyed it.

9

Taha: The man entered the restaurant and ordered bog juice (*German "Moorsaft"*) with oranges.

Mira: Wait a minute! What did you say?

Taha: Bog Juice ("*Moorsaft*") with Oranges. Why are you laughing?

Mira: What do you think?

Taha: No idea.

Mira: What do you mean, he ordered "bog juice with oranges"?

Taha: I don't know. That's what it says.

Mira: But think about it, Taha!

Taha: Maybe they mean the water they soak the orange pieces in?

Mira: In German there is the word moor and the word carrot, they sound a bit similar.

But if you listen carefully, you'll notice that they are pronounced quite differently. Listen:

Moor ... carrot. (*German: "Moor – Möhre"*) Can you hear that?

Taha: Sounds the same to me.

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Mira: But it can't be, Taha. You can't go to a restaurant and order bog juice. They'll laugh at you.

Taha: Just like you.

Mira: I'm sorry.

Taha: Let's call it a night.

Mira: No, we go on. Don't be lazy.

Taha: I'm not lazy.

Taha: But you've already done a lot for me today... From the job centre to the city hall... Six hours you've been interpreting for me, taking care of my papers.

Mira: No problem. I'm fine.

Taha: I know, but we can rest a little.

Mira: I'm not tired.

Taha: I'm tired, Mira, I'm tired. I need a break. Mira, you help me so much, you're there for me from morning to night...

Mira: So what's the problem?

Taha: I'm not saying there's a problem, but I can't find time to be alone.

Mira: And what will you do during this time?

Taha: Excuse me?

Mira: You want time alone to be depressed. Don't you?

Taha: Yeah. So what's the problem?

Mira: The problem is, it's no good for you.

Taha: I don't know if this is going to help me or not. But if I feel I need it, why not?

Mira: This is not good, Taha. It's not good to do things that you know are not good. You have to fight it.

Taha: You yourself are in a good mood sometimes, and then you suddenly disappear for hours in your room and don't allow anyone to talk to you. Why are you allowed to be depressed and others are not?

Mira: But I'm not depressed.

Taha: You get upset and tense and then you just want to be alone.

Mira: That's right.

Taha: I really wonder about you. All the time I think that respect for privacy is a red line for you that no one should cross, no matter why.

Mira: We have become very good friends and we care for each other and support each other.

Taha: Then wouldn't it be normal for you to tell your friend what's wrong with you? This sudden tension and always this nervousness... You sit in your room for hours... Your extreme moodiness...

Mira: You are right. I didn't think you had so many questions about my life... Or maybe I did think it, but I tried not to think about it.

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I used to make fun of people who wrote diaries, but now I do it too. I want you to know my story. Maybe you're afraid of me, maybe you're afraid for me, I don't want that.

"February 23, 2019

My name is Mira, and I am thirty-eight years old. I write in my diary as part of the treatment for my morphine addiction..."

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Mira, Taha: I've been in treatment for a few weeks, and during that time I had a bad relapse, they had to inject me morphine several times. Then they took my children away from me because, according to the last medical assessment, I could be a danger to them if we lived in the same apartment.

Today I am starting a new cure, which I hope to continue until the end, so that I can live normally again. Just like before... Today I can imagine my life as it was before the morphine ... as if it was a dream ... a beautiful long dream.

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Mira: For a long time I could say I was happy. I had achieved everything I dreamed of.

My life was organized and calm, everything was in order. Everything had a purpose.

In my dreams I often saw a water surface. The water is very still. Mostly it's the water of a lake. As quiet as my life. A nice apartment, a nice husband, healthy children and financial security. My family is well and I have many friends. I live in safety. It's like paradise.

I knew only too well that outside this paradise there is much misfortune, hunger, wars, catastrophes. And I knew there was nothing I could do... In my life, honestly, there's nothing that hasn't been normal. A quiet, unspectacular, orderly life. A life that I love... or have loved.

Until a few months ago...

There were only a few days left until my birthday, and Toni suggested not to celebrate my birthday with other people this year ... Toni knows how much I like to celebrate, how much I like to spend my birthday together with my friends, but nevertheless he suggested that we go to our little house in the country. I saw through him immediately. I knew that he was preparing a surprise for me and that he wanted to invite all my friends there.

Then he asked me to take the car to get some things for dinner. He sent me far away from our vacation home. The time should be enough for our friends to come and prepare the surprise. I played along and pretended to know nothing. I drove very slowly. I was happy.

I drove past a small lake. Although I often drove this route, I had never noticed the lake before. Maybe this time I drove slower than usual. And to give Toni more time, I stopped and got out. I sat down on the shore. There was absolutely no wind. I watched the calm water. I got lost in thought, laid down, closed my eyes, maybe I fell asleep. For the first time I saw the water surface not from above but from below. The water surrounded me and I looked up. That was a very pleasant feeling. I knew that there was no air and that I was slowly coming to an end, but that did not bother me.

When I opened my eyes, it was late. I ran back to the car and started driving. On the way, I was wondering who would be at the party. I knew which cake Toni would buy, what music he would play, I knew how he had decorated the apartment. I even saw the pictures that were taken. I saw them in the family album... Everything was right in front of me.

At a small roundabout in front of our house I drove into another car. I have no idea how the accident happened. All I know is that I hadn't seen the car. I found out later that it was a bad accident. My car had crashed into the other car. They pulled me out unconscious. Miraculously, I had escaped death. I had severe bruises, my leg was broken several times and my knee joint was almost crushed. I was quickly taken to the hospital, and I underwent several operations. I was not life-threateningly injured, but they were afraid that I would not be able to walk properly.

The first real feeling I remember was when I came out from anaesthesia after the operation. I screamed in pain, it was hell. It was like someone was digging up my body. An orderly came in and injected me with something. The pain went away very quickly. I became very light and saw the surface of the lake before me, before I hurried back to the car; before I thought about what Toni was preparing for the party; before I saw the faces of our guests and the photos in the family album. What the nurse had injected me catapulted me back in time.

Before he left, I asked him, "What did you inject me with?" He smiled, and his smile was as still as the surface of the water. "Morphine."

In the days after the operation I constantly asked for morphine. I was in a lot of pain and needed a strong painkiller, but I also enjoyed the effect ... It made me so light...

I admit that I was very aware of the danger of what I was doing. At some point, at least mentally, I would have been able to resist and endure the pain and not demand a new injection. I knew how much my dependence threatened my health and family life. But somehow I put all I had at stake. Somehow I was arrogant. What did I want? What was I

looking for? I don't know which direction I was going, I don't know what was under the calm surface of the water, I don't know where all that pain came from.

All I know is the pain won't stop, but the morphine's wearing off.

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Taha (D/A):

That the pain won't stop, but the morphine's wearing off.

I couldn't get that sentence out of my head.

And I have no idea why... I saw the sentence on a sign held up at a demonstration in Deraa at the beginning of the revolution in Syria:

The pain won't stop, but the morphine's wearing off.

In 2011 the revolution broke out. Without hesitation, I immediately joined the coordination committee of my city and became one of its most active members. I had great hope that the revolution would win. And I had the even greater hope that my father would visit me in a dream and be satisfied with me. I became a media officer whose task was to tell the truth.

The regime claimed that there were no demonstrations, and I filmed the demonstrations.

The regime said there were terrorists who were destroying the country, and I filmed the peaceful demonstrators, as well as the security forces, while they were arresting and killing people.

The regime forbade correspondents from all over the world to come to us and show what was really happening and how brutal the Syrian regime is ... This is what I did instead... The revolution was a chance for me not to be a victim, but a hero.

Two years passed and the revolution did not win. Some revolutionaries withdrew, others took up arms. The regime bombed all the cities that had revolted. Some cities were razed to the ground. Participation in demonstrations was suicide, and there were no longer peaceful actions. I tried to report about the fighting, but I realized the first time that this was not my place. The sound of the bullets and the detonations and all the killing scared me terribly. I tried to fight against the fear, the desperation and the exhaustion. In the city there were still some young men like me. I contacted them and tried to convince them to resume the peaceful struggle together.

We met and decided to work together. These people made me happy, they took me back to the first days of the revolution.

When the meeting was over and we said goodbye to each other, we were hit by a grenade.

I don't know how I survived.

I only see the body parts of my friends around me, and dust, dust, dust, dust.

I remember seeing my father.

He helped me get up, tap the clothes and walk away.

Without packing my things and without saying goodbye to anyone, I travelled to Beirut.

The pain won't stop, but the morphine's wearing off.

Taha (D/A):

Terrible pain and no morphine.

Another time of seclusion.

Every few hours I went to her room door and found it locked.

I only found Arko. He was waiting too.

We were both worried about her.

I went down to the living room, he followed me, sat down in front of me and asked me with his look for Mira.

Taha Arabic: I do not know. As you can see, she's been in her room for two days.

Taha (D): Arko got his toy, put it in front of me and shook himself.

Taha Arabic: All right, Arko, I'm going to play with you a bit. We have something that concerns us both, but that doesn't mean we're close now. I'm really not very enthusiastic about dogs, and I hope you won't take this personally.

Taha (D): Arko became more and more cheerful and urged more and more to play.

Taha (D): I noticed that I had spoken to Arko in Arabic. Maybe I should speak German with him.

Taha (Arabic, D): "Listen, Mr Arko, I honestly don't like it at all, when Mira locks herself in her room. But it's the only time to which I can devote my depression in peace. So, take your toys and leave me alone. Do me a favor. Don't you have depression you can savour? «

Taha: When Mira had her depression, Arko and I became friends. Toni left the house early and came back late. I learned when and how much Arko had to eat. I went out with him. I always had to carry a little bag with me...

Taha (D/A): Such happy moments!

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Mira: April 15, 2019

Everyone, and me in the first place, says that the fact that my children have been taken away from me is reason enough for me to stop using morphine. Everyone, and I in the first place, believes that I can draw the strength I need from my love for my children to overcome my addiction.

Whenever I look at my children and see what beautiful and weak beings they are, I am afraid for them.

Mira, Taha: On TV I watch news about the wars around the world and I see the children. I don't know what goes on in people who drive children away and kill them. I know that the wars are far away, but still I am afraid. I follow the news about children who have lost their parents, who have been stolen, who have been kidnapped or killed. My blood freezes in my veins when I imagine for even a second that a similar fate could befall my children. Our neighbour's only son died last year from a heroin overdose. He was twenty-one years old.

Mira: After his death I was afraid for a long time that a similar fate would befall one of my children. I tried to reject these thoughts from me so that they would not become a fixed idea, and I really believed that I had banished these fears from my mind.

It's really quite strange that I am the addict today!

Everyone has put their hopes in me, Toni, my parents, our friends, our neighbors, even my children. They all lean on me today. All eyes are on me, I must not disappoint them. I am the only one who can end this state of affairs. I feel like a soccer player who has to take the last penalty kick in a final game. All eyes are on him. Everyone suddenly sees him as their hero and puts all their hopes on him. All of a sudden he realizes that he is their hero. And if he is not their hero, they will curse and destroy him and call him a failure forever.

The funny thing is that the moment you are weakest is also the moment when the others ask you to be a heroine. This contradiction is really weird.

Today I am weak as never before in my life, I am dependent on a very strong narcotic.

And at this very moment everyone expects me to be a heroine.

Ever since they took my children from me, everyone has been talking about loving my children and overcoming my addiction. They all connect my love for my children and my ability to get off morphine. It's like they're saying that if I can't get off morphine, I don't love my children enough. Suddenly my love for my children is subject to a condition.

16

Taha (D/A):

Whenever Mira comes back from visiting her children, she is sad.

She told me that the children become more distant and cooler each time.

She told me that she was afraid that the distance to them would alienate her from her. I

see and feel the great pain Mira lives in. Mira saved me from the cycle of depression.

And it is her who is fighting an even worse depression.

Now it's my turn to love and give.

I'm repeating my story. I take refuge in the theatre, just like I did in Beirut. That's how I saved myself in Beirut. The puppet theatre. I convinced Mira that her relationship with the children improves when she plays for them. It was hard to convince her, but we started working.

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Mira: You won't like this scene. Let's think of something else.

Taha: If we change the story every time you visit them, the play won't be finished.

Mira: They're not going to like what we're doing here. They probably have a puppet show and professionals there.

Taha: I'm a professional.

Mira: But not me.

Taha: If you want to quit, we'll quit.

Mira: And if it doesn't work? Nothing will bring the children back to me.

Taha: If that's how you feel, it won't work. You have to think it will work. You have to think it's your right to make them laugh at you.

Mira: I'm afraid I'll become even stranger to them.

Taha: If you're afraid of that, you'll probably seem even stranger to them.

Mira: But I'm scared.

Taha: Let's move on. The puppet is a personality. We have to see the personality in the doll. But first you must live this personality yourself.

(Mira speaks with the voice of Stupid)

Stupid/Mira: Okay, but I want to play a different story.

Dumb/Taha: You got another story?

Stupid/Mira: Yes. So, not a real story. More of an idea. Ideas.

Dumb/Taha: But you're the smartest person in the world, the smartest girl. When you tell it "Tell us a story," it immediately tells a story.

Stupid/Mira: Stupid is the smartest girl in the world, she is a story seller. People come to her and pay her money to tell them a story. And one day a customer came in, his name was Dumb.

Dumb/Taha: Good afternoon, Mrs. Stupid. I've been told that you have very nice stories. I want a story that no one has heard before.

Stupid/Mira: I'd be happy to, sir ...

Dumb/Taha: Stupid.

Stupid/Mira: It is an honor, Mr. Stupid.

Dumb/Taha: Let's hear it!

Stupid/Mira: Once upon a time there was a girl who was called "The most beautiful girl in the world". The girl had long soft golden hair. Her face was pure like milk, her mouth a full strawberry, her nose was narrow and straight as if drawn, and her eyes were jewels. When she walked, a light shone from her, and everyone who saw this light fell in love with her. But she was pitiful, for she fell in love with no one. One day, "The most beautiful girl in the world" went for a walk by the lake. She approached the water to check her beauty, but she did not see her face in the water, but a boy smiling at her. She knew immediately that this boy was "The most beautiful boy in the world", for from him a light emanated that resembled the light she herself radiated. "The most beautiful girl in the world" could not swim, but still she walked towards the boy. With every step she took she dived a little further into the water.

She was not afraid, but she was freezing. So she accelerated her steps. More and more, until the water completely covered her, while the boy came closer and closer. And the closer the boy came, the stronger the light that radiated from him became. And at the moment when the light of "The most beautiful boy in the world" met the light of "The most beautiful girl in the world" a great explosion occurred in the lake... No, no... The moment the light of "The most beautiful boy in the world" met the light of "The most beautiful girl in the world", they turned into golden fish. And they were called "The two most beautiful fishes in the world". They swam together, looking for a shell in which to live, a warm little shell... They found it at the deepest point of the lake, in a place where there was nothing, where there was nobody.

Taha (D/A):

In Beirut I was abroad for the first time.

For the first time after the revolution I could breathe freely.

The first day in Beirut was the first day without fear of checkpoints, without fear of grenades.

I needed a few days to recover, to get some rest. Those few days became a week, a month, two months, a year...

For a whole year I just tried to get some rest. And when I became calmer, I wondered whether that was my right, whether I had the right to rest.

The situation in Syria was getting worse and worse. How could I recover while Deraa was destroyed. How could I recover when I received daily news of the deaths of people who had died in my place. It would have been better if I had died with my friends.

Was the revolution a mistake?

Did we go about it the wrong way?

Should I have stayed in Syria?

Should we have been more courageous in our confrontation with the regime?

Will I ever return to Syria?

Will the regime remain?

If the regime remains, does that mean its victory?

Our defeat?

And if we are defeated, does that mean the revolution is defeated?

These questions determined my life in Beirut. If I can consider that a life... My father visited me less and less in my dreams. Mostly he was pissed off.

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Taha (D/A)

Taha: Can I kill myself?

Father/Taha: If you could kill yourself, you wouldn't ask me.

Taha: Will I be a hero if I kill myself?

Father/Taha: If you were a hero, you wouldn't be asking me

Taha: I'm thinking about going back to Deraa.

Father/Taha: Which Deraa?

Taha: The warm Deraa.

Father/Taha: And what else are you thinking about?

Taha: I am thinking about emigrating to Germany via the sea. Or going to Egypt to study acting. Or to live in Turkey and work in a shawarma shop or stay in Beirut.

Father/Taha: Do you like getting drunk on arak in Beirut?

Taha: I'm more serious than you imagine.

Father/Taha: You are clumsier than I imagine.

Taha: This is what you are telling me after all this time you haven't been around?

Father/Taha: What else are you thinking about?

Taha: That I stay with you in dreams or that you stay in life with me.

Father/Taha: Nice try...

Taha (D/A):

I woke up and went to my friend who worked in a camp for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and asked him to volunteer. I told him that I had given puppetry workshops in Syria and that I had formed a troupe of puppeteers at the university, that I had a lot of experience in making and playing the puppets, and I suggested to teach the children how to play the puppets.

I started right away... The children saved me.

They reminded me that there is a future that may be better.

We formed a group that we called "Tomorrow is more beautiful". We made dolls and performed plays for the camp's residents. The kids and I wanted nothing more than to be together.

The small tent in which I taught the children became the safest place in the world for me. Every day forty children came with all their energy and love of life. It was very cold in winter and very hot in summer, but nobody cared.

This tent was our paradise. I only had a small problem. Two six-year-olds, Rami and Lina, were totally unhappy, they lived in another world. They weren't interested in the performances or in the puppets. All the time they played or fought, and when they fought, the other kids fought with them. Some were for Rami, others for Lina. And during the fight they weren't called Rami and Lina anymore, but became Dumb and Stupid. I tried everything to get them under control, but it was hopeless. Until one day Rami and Lina didn't show up for rehearsals. I learned that Lina had emigrated to

Germany with her family. And Rami hadn't talked to anyone since he found out, he just cried.

I tried to convince him that Lina would be happy in Germany and that maybe they would meet again in the future. When I said that, I wasn't sure I was doing the right thing. I didn't know if it was right to nurture the hope that he would see Lina again. That's when I got an idea. Rami's imagination was going to decide what would happen in the future. I suggested he should do a new play in which we imagined what would happen in Lina's and Rami's future. At first he thought the idea was funny, but then he gradually became friendly with it. And all the children took part in the new play about Rami and Lina.

And we called it "Dumb and Stupid."

22

Mira: Group session. They're all normal people. A lawyer, an architect, a graphic designer, a teacher... People you meet every day. People who could live within the system until something happened in their lives, and suddenly they were kind of outcast. Some had experienced domestic violence or had been treated badly, companies had gone bankrupt, they had lost their jobs and were now in debt to the bank, some had made a mistake at work and could not bear the consequences ...

One mistake and you fall out of the system. The system punishes anyone who is outside it harshly. But what was my mistake?

Taha (D/A): But what was my mistake?

Taha (D/A):

In 2015, the residence law for Syrians in Lebanon was amended. The conditions for residence became more difficult. I had to find someone to vouch for me. Or to get an employment contract. I couldn't find either one. Suddenly there was an organization that wanted to take over my work in the camp. They threatened to report me to the police because I was living in Lebanon without a residence permit.

I had no choice but the sea.

There were fifty of us. My mind had stopped and my heart had become numb. I joined the group, I would go with them wherever they went and do anything. When I looked into the eyes of the people, I saw that they were all in the same situation, without mind and feeling. I was very afraid of the trip by boat from Turkey to Greece. I had heard so many times about the dead people in the sea. But our crossing went without any problems. I sat between two young men. The one on my right had a small Koran and read from it in a loud voice. The one on my left had spun a few joints. He smoked and sang loudly, too. The one with the Koran let me read a bit with him. And the one with the joints gave me a puff now and then and let me sing with him. Pretty soon I gave the stoner the Koran and the pious guy the joint. I don't know how it happened, but just before we arrived, the three of us were lying in each other's arms singing aloud Koran verses!

A very long journey began in Greece. I had to get to Germany over land... run, run, run... Police... ..border... running... fleeing... shouting ... and in the end I was suddenly in

Germany... and just as I had started to look for a method in Lebanon to get rid of my guilty conscience because I had left Syria, I was looking for a method in Germany to get rid of my guilty conscience because I had left the children in the refugee camp in Beirut ... Until I met Mira.

24

Mira: Taha... Taha!

Taha: What's up? How you doing?

Mira: Everything is ok ... Get up, let's rehearse ... the play must be ready when I go to see the girls... Make them laugh and love me again ... they must come home again... I must get back to normal ... Everything has to go back to how it was before the accident ... This is all going to happen, isn't it?

Taha: Yeah, of course it's going to happen, but not now. It's six in the morning.

Mira: Now it's going to happen. Come on, your coffee's ready.

25

Taha (D/A):

I had no choice but to bow to her wishes. I had to rehearse with her. I had already become accustomed to her mood swings, which could go to madness... Sometimes it got too much for me ... but with the catastrophic news from Syria, rehearsals with Mira were an emotional and mental distraction. The Assad regime had regained control of my

village, and it seemed as if they would take back the whole city of Deraa. My mother, with whom I had difficulty communicating, had found a way to escape to Damascus. The rehearsals were not easy. Sometimes Mira joined in and was enthusiastic, sometimes she resisted. I myself wasn't sure if the performance would be well received by the girls. But I had seen how every little bit of progress in rehearsals had a big impact on Mira's mood, so much so that I could see how she was about to break the addiction and get her children back.

Until two days before the visit ... Mira was in her room and refused to come out. She was fed up.

26

Mira, Taha: May 3, 2019

Calm before the storm.

Before the worst addiction phase, the patient experiences very special moments of peace and quiet. He can see everything clearly and distinctly. His emotions, his thinking, his mood are very moderate. It is as if he is at zero-point.

These are moments of which one does not know how long they will last, but mostly they are only short moments. It's like a last chance to say or do something before the storm comes. Before you become a monster who can destroy everything in its path.

Mira: I went to Toni and gave him a long kiss.

Will you stay with me if I continue to be an addict?

Toni/Taha: There's no way I'm going to abandon you, Mira, no matter what.

Mira: Even if I remain addicted all my life?

Toni/Taha: Even then.

Mira: What are you going to tell our girls about me?

Toni/Taha: What do you mean?

Mira: What will you tell them when they ask for me?

Toni/Taha: The truth.

Mira: Which is...?

Toni/Taha: That you got addicted to morphine after surgery and can't get out of it.

Mira: Why?

Toni/Taha: What "why"?

Mira: Why can't I get away from it?

Toni/Taha: I don't know, Mira. You have the answer.

Mira: I don't know.

Toni/Taha: You need to know. The pain after the operation is over. You are living today with imaginary pain. It's completely psychological. You ask for morphine to treat imaginary pain.

Mira: You're right. You're always right. What you say is always logical. But that's not why.

Toni/Taha: Then what is it?

Mira: Maybe I can't stop the morphine because I don't want to. The addiction is really hell. But I understand now why it is hell. When I stop the morphine, I go back to my former life, and that scares me.

Taha/Toni: I don't understand. What about your past life? Why are you afraid to go back there?

Mira: If you could see it from my perspective, you'd die of fear.

Toni/Taha: What are you talking about? Are you talking about us? About our love?

About our life, our apartment, our girls, our past? Are these the things that scare you?

Mira: No. These things are very beautiful. But I don't know why I'm afraid. I don't know what's holding me back.

Toni/Taha: Try it!

Mira: I'm trying, Toni. I swear I'm trying with all my strength, but I can't.

Our former life was very beautiful. Everything was real. But I don't know why I can't go back to that life. I don't know why it scares me. It's like I see another side of the truth.

I see a life without pity. And that's why I'm afraid to go back.

I still want to get well and I still want to escape this hell. But when I look at my former life, I see nothing but a second hell. I'm kind of caught between two hells.

I am now, in this moment, able to see things very clearly and talk about them calmly and with concentration. But that will not last long. I will go back to my hallucinations and my inner conflict, and I really don't know if I can get out of it again. So please listen to me carefully. You're the only one I want to tell the truth to.

Toni/Taha: Mira, I really don't understand you.

Mira: Maybe I can get past this stage and get off the morphine. Or maybe not.

Maybe my condition will get worse, I'll be taken to intensive care, and maybe I'll die in the end. But in any case, we have to discuss what to tell our girls when they are older.

Toni/Taha: We'll talk about that later. Don't worry about it ...

Mira: Toni, there's no more time. You don't understand! We have to talk it over now.

I have tried all my life to be successful, strong and balanced. I saw the evil around us and found logical explanations for it and lived my life and said, maybe we can't do anything

...

Toni/Taha: Mira

Mira: But I have found that with all that I have done, I have stored the pain within me. I don't even know how I could store it all inside of me. Maybe that's the real poison, Toni.

Toni/Taha: What is it?

Mira: Try not to be a hero when you're weak.

Toni/Taha: Mira, I don't understand you.

Mira: When you stand in front of the mirror, do you recognize yourself easily?

Toni/Taha: Mira, you're hallucinating!

Mira: Please tell the girls that their mother chose addiction of her own free will and in full awareness of the danger. And that she chose to stay in it until the end. And they should ask themselves why. If you and I can't understand what happened, maybe they can find out why their mother did this.

Toni/Taha: Mira

Mira: I don't want them to be afraid of being like me. But I also don't want them to live the same hell I have lived and continue to live

28

Taha (D/A): I knocked on her door, I pushed, she screamed, I kept pushing, then she opened the door and freaked out.

Mira: Eat shit, eat shit, eat shit, eat shit! You're an idiot! You think you're a hero? You're a loser. A loser who covers up his failure by playing the part of a hero in my life. Get out there and be a hero in your country! Get out of my life!

Taha (D/A):

She jumped me, she beat me, she slammed the door...

Taha (both German):

You're an idiot...

You think you're a hero?

You're a loser. A failure who covers up his failure by playing the part of a hero in my life. Get out of my life.

Taha (D/A): Those words stuck in my head as if they were the truth. I was tired, I had to get out of here right away. What am I doing to myself? I always get myself into these situations. Instead of starting a new life and building my future... instead of taking care of myself, replacing everything I lost in life... The next morning I packed my things and got ready to leave... She had calmed down a bit and came to my room holding her doll.

Stupid/Mira: Hello Dumb, hello!

-

Stupid /Mira: You really are dumb.

Taha: Mira, what do you want?

Stupid /Mira: I don't want anything, Stupid wants something. But you have to answer her.

Taha: What do you want, Stupid?

Stupid/Mira: Don't go, stay. Mira loves you... And she apologizes for what she did yesterday.

Mira: You know my situation, and you know that I was in a state where I could not think clearly. I had no intention of hitting you.

Taha: And what you said? Where did that come from? Why didn't you tell me before that you thought I was a failure? And do you really think that I'm playing the hero in front of you?

Mira: I just said that to piss you off. To get you to leave me alone. I just wanted to be alone. And you didn't hear me.

Taha: Okay, but I've had it. I'm going.

Mira: You disappoint me.

Taha: Maybe, but I don't want to be in that situation anymore, disappointing either myself or others. What you did to me yesterday is similar to what happened to me in Syria. And I left Syria against my will. And it is similar to what happened to me in

Lebanon, and I left Lebanon against my will. I left the children, although working with them gave my life meaning. And now I am leaving you and I am leaving against my will. Whenever I have given all I can, I have to leave in the end. I am always wrong. In Syria at the time of the revolution, and in Beirut with the children from the camp and here with you... I'm stuck in a vicious circle, and the last person I can help is myself.

Mira: And me.

Taha: Toni is here. He loves you, and you love him. You can help each other

Mira: And the show and the girls?

Taha: Either you do it alone, or you don't do it at all. It's no use.

Mira: Do you even know what you're doing?

Taha: For eight years, I have been thinking I know what I am doing. And you know what? Every time I do, I sink deeper.

Mira: You decided to give me hope. And you decided to kill it.

Taha: So you think I am an egoist. If only I were an egoist, I'd take a little interest in myself.

Mira: You refuse to forgive me. It's easy to demand that others forgive you. But you can't do it yourself.

Taha: Right. Because I'm playing the hero. And I'm actually a loser.

30

Taha (D/A): Two months had passed without me hearing anything from Mira. I had often thought about calling her. I thought it was better to wait a little longer. I wanted to

tell her that I missed her and that I would start my life in Berlin with great hope and that I had made progress in learning German and that I would soon study acting at the university, in German, and that none of this would have happened without her support and that sometimes I think my reaction was exaggerated. I would tell her that I still have her diary and that I will give it back to her so she can continue writing her story. I would tell her that I have decided to write my story. I like the way she writes. And finally I admitted to myself that I missed her voice. I decided to call her just to tell her that I yearned for her voice. I called, but I didn't hear her voice. It was Toni. Mira had been dead for two weeks, dying of a morphine overdose.

31

Mira, Taha: I love the beginning of summer. I went for a walk with Arko as usual, but something was different today. The sun spread a warm light, and the light penetrated deep into my pores until it reached my heart - my heart that can't get enough warmth, as if it lives on the warmth, as if it's addicted to it. With the sun, a light cool breeze also caressed my face, it kissed me. A special moment. Everything around me was green. Time seemed to stand still. I thought of the question that Toni and I always like to answer when we are drunk... How do you want to die? A really difficult question. I didn't really like it and never tried to answer it. But now I felt like I had an answer. I would take off my clothes, lie down on the ground and expose myself to the sun... ...and die. I stood up... I chose the place where I would lie down. I started to undo the buttons on my dress... If Arko hadn't barked to get me out of this state... He'd jumped on a guy and

started sniffing and licking him... I knew this guy, I used to see him on the same bench. He stayed alone in the park and learned German... He was about thirty, well dressed, smiling most of the time. And most of the time he was sitting somewhere where there was nobody. He had a very friendly face. He seemed to be nice and trustworthy. And it seemed like Arko liked him, so he ran to him and wanted to play with him ... The man went up to him and joined in. Even though you could see that he was afraid and that he wanted to hide his fear. I decided not to call the dog, I wanted to calm the man down. I went over to him and sat down next to him and put my hand out to him.

32

Mira: Hello, I'm Mira. My dog's name is Arko. He rarely plays with strangers.

Taha (both German): Hello Mira, I am Taha.

Mira: On this special day, I met Taha.

33

Taha (D/A):

So now I'm in Berlin. I return to the same vicious circle. If I had stayed in Deraa, I might have made a difference in Syria can. If I had stayed with the children in Beirut, they might have believed in hope. If I had stayed with Mira, she would be alive now. And

maybe she would have gotten over the morphine. And maybe she'd be happy. But I left her... like I killed her.

34

Taha (D/A):

Father/Taha: Can you do something else besides grieving? And tell me you're a victim?

Taha: I tried.

Father/Taha: But you didn't move on.

Taha: You've been avoiding me. You don't visit me anymore.

Father/Taha: The dead are busy, Taha. When you die, you'll know.

Taha: I don't want this story anymore. I want a different story.

Father/Taha: Heroes don't change their stories. Heroes finish their stories.

Taha: All right. If I finish my story, will you come and see me again and smile?

Father/Taha: I can't promise you anything.

Taha: And I can't promise you anything either.

The End