

*Rasha Abbas*

# A Plate of Salmon is Not Completely Cleansed of Blood

Hey, stray dogs, time moves pretty fast: demand freedom even if just with a balloon, call the firefighters even if just for a chat ... Baniyas? Of course I'm friends with it on Facebook, and we've got 120 mutual friends. Cigarette? You don't smoke? My hobby is collecting foreign coins, please, eat up, there's salmon for lunch – don't watch the corpses and the children with ripped-out fingernails on YouTube before lunch, you don't want to lose your appetite for the salmon – wash your hands before and after you eat, on the occasion of the drought and the state-of-emergency law.

Whatever you do, please don't tell the *Hajja* that I smoke in the house and that I invite my friend the sniper in while she's not here ... The sniper's taking a stroll along the corridor, come and listen to this Robbie Williams song with me –

Oh, that reminds me, are you gonna boycott Facebook? Because of that page about the *Intifada*, of course, you idiot!

Circle your answer:

– Yes

- No
- Up my bum
- The Danube River

Us Syrians are generous, hospitable people, and good hosts usually don't murder al-Hariri, and the sheikh doesn't put on heavy black musk perfume and put his finger up a passing priest's arsehole, even as a joke.

Careful, look where you're going, for fuck's sake – you've spilled the whole glassful over me. Shh, the infiltrators are waking up ... We haven't got enough salmon for everyone; in the meeting room of a satellite TV channel the boss pounds the table with his fist *transparently*, shouting: 'No retreat, no retreat, forward!' *Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim*, God have mercy on your mind, that's not the boss, it's the remains of the salmon in your stomach causing you nightmares – what the boss is actually saying is that he challenges anyone to beat us on the realism we bring to our coverage of events.

I said, would you be willing to bet that surrealism is really appropriate for blending with socialist realism, contrary to what you thought? Unfortunately this attempt to unexpectedly establish a new 'socialist surrealism' movement wasn't welcomed by any of the people gathered around the meeting table. The four screens suspended above it were showing the sleepers lying on the ground in al-Bayda, an adolescent boy dancing on top of them. And what *is* this, anyway? Tap dancing? Or isn't it, like, flamenco, dude? Watch those videos and that's where they'll put you – in a white amnesiac coma, keeping you happy. One of the four screens interrupts the state-security flamenco show with an advert for Lacoste perfume; a young woman with wolf-like lips calls you with all that's in her, the wolf dancing continues on the three nearby screens, I'm going home. The Hajja is weeping in front of the television – she makes me feel upset because I haven't cried – the weirdest thing is that I don't cry!

The Hajja says: 'Have you seen the video of the defeat of al-Bayda?' So I scold her for not having prepared me salmon for lunch when I'm exhausted from work, and she – a believer – suddenly turns on God, demanding

that he come down to Earth. But come here, you ... The sniper's in the corridor, running toward the Hajja's bedroom, come back here and we'll watch *CSI* on television, I love watching TV with someone while I eat, I also like sleeping with the TV on, it's strange ... And that reminds me, I meant to say, it'd turn me on if you made love to me with the TV on! Don't worry, I'm not harassing you, even though you're tempting me to, I'm basically waiting for the sniper – he's still running from the corridor toward my mother's room. Listen, if the sniper kills my mum we'll go and eat that salmon with slices of lemon on her bed, there's a TV in there too, we'll watch it while we stain her clean sheets with bits of salmon, what do you say to that?

The sniper's running through the corridor, what a shame he doesn't slow down so we could dance with him a bit. Peace be upon you, sniper, peace be upon the day you were born and the day you're resurrected, I solemnly pledge that if my mother's still alive when you leave our house I'll somehow stop her from ever watching that YouTube video of the boy they stripped and forced to kiss the bare feet of a man held captive in a basement. Of course you and I both know that the video's a fabrication – the lifeless wooden look in the boy's eyes is fake, the stick being pushed up his anus is fake, the time that clots and congeals around him is fake.

Leave those YouTube kids alone! Enough of them! What have we missed on the soap opera? Uffff, do you realise you're really bad company? You're not talking at all, did you just come here to eat? Go on, eat up and fuck off, I'll go and run with my handsome friend the sniper! Hey! Sniper! Leave my mother alone!

*Translated from the Arabic by Alice Guthrie*