

For Damascus

This summer seeping through the fractures
of Damascus is killing me. I creep like rust
on the doors of this prison, now turned
into a museum. I sit in a cafe
frightened and shrinking on days
when money is scarce, and laughing loudly
on days when my shifty pockets are full.
Damascus is my cracked home, and
Kasyon is what I grieve. I sprawl
in the evening like horns of cars
and carts of broad beans. Strangers and
tourists take to me. I am fenceless, any
joy that betrays me, returns
in sorrow to my laughing face. I
am a weird blend; my face mirrors
the wretched and the shopfront displays.
My body is fields of burning
wheat and my tongue scolds like a shoe.
The policeman, the teacher and
the mysterious man stare at me, so I sadly
laugh, and they joyfully cry. Damascus
is mine, and I will not share my bed with
anyone other than the wicked and
the whores. I am the descending ladder
to high pits and the footsteps of thieves
on the sand. My body is a departure
motel and my words are tiny gospels that
the prophets had lost, so the prodigal sons
embraced them. Therefore, I will toss the crumbs
to birds on barbed wire, and I will castrate
glory on asphalt. This is what they taught us
in public schools, before they let us off
like rabbits to chew the grass
of submission. I said to you that I will not
allow anyone to sneak in and peek at Damascus
as she bathes alone, her small
breasts timidly uncovered, I will not
let you
in.

Ghayath Almadhoun

Translated by Zeina Issa