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Why Did You Leave So Soon, My Friend

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Why Did You Leave So Soon, My Friend

For the memory of Muhammad Faqih Salih (1953-2017)

Why Muhammad?

Why did you leave me so soon in

my self- imposed exile?

To whom shall I talk and repeat

the stories of our youth, our years of joy and hope?

To whom shall I lament

the “land of flowers and henna” which nestled

in our youthful souls

and we still love in our old age?

How shall we face the ancestors

in their shrines, in their tales of exile

and their poems which memorized and sang.

To whom Muhammad?

I repeat and repeat our stories and jokes

about simple folks in Tripoli, Waddan, Sabha,

Benghazi and Mighty Cairo?

Do you remember our first meeting at

Cairo’s College of Economics and Political Science?

The pretty female students at the café

the rebel writers who became our friends,

Ali, Amal, and Hilmi, and the now fabled Abdulhakam al-Jarahi's group

Why did you leave so soon?

You son of Tripoli and its good artisans,

keeper of the great poet's flame: Ghanaba and Rgahi, Rafiq and Shiltami.

Decent and generous, quick tempered but forgiving,

you survived the dictator's prison and his sadistic hollow men.

They could not break you, and your spirit has outlived them.

You loved poetry, books, and the literature of all people,

Within you, your homeland, your proud culture, the dreams

of the forgotten ones, and our humanity

stood conjoined in your heart.

To whom shall I talk, vent, and share a good laugh

about the harvest of our year, our nights youth and pain?

Salaam, and God's mercy upon you, dear brother.

You will be forever with our beloved light,

forever guiding the lost.