



مما كتبت

Lost in Narratives

.Community without communication gives way to communication without community

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convulsed when he felt joy, and convulsed when he grieved; convulsed when he laughed, and convulsed when he wept; convulsed when he hungered, and convulsed when he was full; convulsed when he ran, and convulsed when he rested — as though it were a shadow reminding .him that a single moment is enough to end everything

When he arrived home, the dog was waiting at the door. Leo was wagging his tail in every directions, twisting left and right — it was nearly eleven, and he had earned his breakfast and his long-overdue morning walk. Dogs are lucky that way: they do not trouble themselves with illness .the way humans do

He dropped his rucksack onto the armchair — dark green velvet — without a thought. He had never once sat in it. He wanted to be rid of it, though it was of the same style favored by the British Queen Anne Stuart; the same style in which Winston Churchill sat while planning his next battle with Adolf Hitler; in which Charles Dickens wrote most of his novels; in which Sigmund Freud listened to his patients through long sessions of analysis — for Freud needed a comfortable chair in order to reconstruct the .narrative his patient had lost

The palpitations worsened. He sat on the sofa across from the chair, trying to catch his breath. He could not shake the thought: had he too lost his narrative? For Freud, psychological pain and disturbances were symptoms of a blockage in the patient's history — an inability to continue one's own story. The first step to healing was to free that blockage. When the patient begins to narrate his life freely, when he places his unspoken fears into words — into language — when he recounts his life in disconnected scenes, scattered blockages within a distorted narrative, Psychoanalysis gathers the contradictory fragments, weighs them, arranges them into a story that can be understood; and the patient recovers his life in a coherent narrative that carries the pain away with it —like a river carrying everything to the sea. If only someone — someone like Freud — would arrive from nowhere and rearrange the scenes of his life that had gone off course, just as his heart had, placing every lost memory, every lodged fear, back in its rightful place. Someone who would come and clear the obstructions that prevent life from .flowing

Community without communication gives way to ..communication without community

The text is a true story told through a philosophical-literary lens. The author has rearranged the events and placed them in a framework that doesn't change the overall meaning. The text wouldn't have been possible without the influence of Byung-Chul Han, in particular his works *The Crisis of Narration* and *The Palliative Society*, as well as Walter Benjamin's *The Storyteller*, Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, as well as other names .mentioned in their respective contexts

This morning too, he returned from the cardiologist with bad news. His heart had lost its rhythm. The heart ordinarily works in regular succession — the two atrial chambers contract, then the two ventricular chambers, in a sequence that a person rarely feels. When this harmony breaks down, it turns daily life into a piece of hell. For reasons the doctors cannot explain, his ventricle had begun contracting ahead of its time, sending a convulsion through his entire body. Not once a day, not twice, not even ten times — but 14,000 times, as though two small puppies were locked in constant battle inside his chest, .shaking him, rattling him, jerking him without mercy

It all began fifteen years ago. On an ordinary night, when he was trying to sleep after an exhausting, grinding day of work, his heart began to pound. He had lived through this before. It would last seconds, sometimes few minutes, then dissolve. But these palpitations felt different—stronger, more violent, and refusing to stop. What made it worse was the brain's stupid response: convinced that death was imminent, It mobilized the sympathetic nervous system — which sympathizes with the body's needs — signalling the adrenal gland to release adrenaline, which only drove the heartbeat faster. Fortunately, the heart is automatically programmed, this time through the parasympathetic nervous system, to cap that acceleration at a certain threshold —otherwise the brain, in its stupidity, would have dealt the heart permanent damage. He spent three nights in intensive .care

Where others move through their days unaware of the heart inside the chest, every convulsion reminded him that the thread of life is thin, and how easily it snaps. His heart

neither love nor hate that bound them, but a transaction: the meeting of daily needs. He too was now caught with life in a transaction, driven by obligation rather than feeling. A relationship without a narrative — contingent, provisional, its value extending no further than the .moment it occupied

Leo finished his meal and looked up at him with gratitude — and a smile, yes, dogs do smile — then lurched toward the door, restless, agitated. His own life too had passed in restlessness; he had searched for peace without ever finding it. He clipped on the leash and set out on the belated morning walk, following the same route as every day — not by choice, but by an unspoken agreement between himself and Leo. New routes carry new scents, and new scents mean potential enemies, hidden dangers.

.Better to keep to the predictable

He had lived his life on the edge, seized by a passion for what might come next, adrenaline constantly moving through his veins. Perhaps it was that relentless surge that had caused his arrhythmia. He had never managed to .speak with the doctor about it at any depth



They attached a Holter monitor to his chest, to track and record the irregularities over 48 hours. The device collects vast amount of data about the heart — how it functions at rest, during sleeping, at work, walking, running, eating, shopping, and even during sex. Data upon data, and then the doctor spends two or three minutes with the patient, no more. He is just a number—the seventh patient today, the tenth, or maybe the eighteenth. The doctor said: “We will wait a few more months and attach the monitor back in. If the rhythm has not improved, we will need to isolate the ectopic foci causing the disturbance and ablate them ”.by catheter

The heart, since the beginning of time, has been controlled



He emptied a large can of meat, carrots and pasta with broth into one bowl, and poured water into another. Leo spun in circles, leaping with joy at the generous meal. Dogs do not savor food — they do not enjoy it; they devour it. Given the chance, they would swallow it in a single bite. A few hundred years, perhaps thousands, of abundant food has not been enough to neutralise the primal instinct—the survival instinct. It still drives them to consume as much as possible, as fast as possible. The next meal may not come, even when the shelf is full — .cans upon cans upon cans

His relationship with the small Maltese was not good one. He had given the dog to his eldest daughter for her thirteenth birthday, after long deliberation. Since then, she had enjoyed his company without bearing the burden of his care. Fathers always carry the sorrow. Leo went out three times a day at fixed hours, indifferent to Berlin’s erratic weather—rain, wind, or snow. His long, silky, pure white coat demanded constant attention: a weekly bath, a trim every two to three months at most. And beyond all that, he was also quarrelsome dog with a commanding personality. He regarded the neighbourhood’s females as his subordinate, and woe to any male — whatever his size — who approached one of them in his presence. He attacked with the ferocity of a lion, though he was .neutered

As he watched Leo devour his meal with an instinct that knows no sentiment, he reflected on their relationship — on how circumstances had entangled their fates. It was



In the distance, the Protestant Church of Hope Berlin-Pankow came into view. He passed it three times a day on his way back from Leo's walks—a dog he neither loved nor hated. It wasn't the dog's fault. He had lost the ability to love a long time ago. He remembered a few lines from the
:poet Charles Baudelaire

My dear chap, you know my fear of horses and carriages. Just now, as I raced across the street, stomping in the mud to get through that chaos in motion where death gallops at you from all sides at once, my halo slipped off my head and onto the filthy ground. I'm afraid I didn't have the sang-froid to pick it up —let's just say I deemed it less disagreeable to lose my insignia than to have my bones broken. And then I said to myself, look for the silver lining. I can now walk around incognito, doing whatever nasty things I like, indulging my vices just as lesser
!mortals do. And here I am, just like you, as you see

He kept turning the line over in his head, "my halo slipped off my head," when Leo stopped to sniff Mimi: a white female like him, but with a fuller and more assured body. He had known her for years, yet each time he tried to sniff her from behind, to fix the scent, to confirm beyond doubt that it was her and no one else. Mimi refused and moved away. Once, they had danced together, played, leapt back and forth. The vet had told him Leo was suffering and needed to be neutered before it turned aggressive. He had hesitated. He wanted Leo to experience sex at least once — to keep, at minimum, a pleasant memory. But the vet had warned him, and the operation went ahead. Leo tried

by two nodes — the sinoatrial node and the atrioventricular node — which regulate its movement by sending electrical signals at a precise, recurring interval. The problem occurs when ectopic foci in the heart muscle—abnormal sites—begin to emit confusing electrical signals, leading to arrhythmias, and the heart loses its rhythm and balance. He thought to himself: "If life is out of balance, maybe the heart is out of rhythm".too

Leo was overjoyed at the walk he had almost lost hope of. He ran and leapt, sniffing here and there. What drew him most was the smell of urine — the signature that identifies. From urine alone he could determine sex, age, illness; he could know what the other had eaten, what mood it carried — whether it was agitated, rabid, or whether a female dog was in heat and ready to mate. He thought of his girlfriend, who once closed her eyes and pushed her nose and mouth slightly forward, as though summoning him: "I will never forget the smell between your thighs." He smiled at the thought that imagining him had been
more powerful than his presence

All his life he never understood why these women fell in love with him. He was not handsome. An oval, with a broad chin; a narrow forehead that had — somehow — widened with age; small sharp eyes beneath thick arched brows; a prominent nose with a drooping tip, thin lips with a darkness to them, their corners turning downwards when he smiled. Even his smile betrayed his sadness, to say nothing of his lean body and hunched back. The one striking about him was the clarity of his skin — luminous, perhaps from the constant sweating; his body was a machine for producing sweat. He was one of those people toward whom, once you knew them, you could not remain neutral; you either loved them or hated them. He had an
.aura

He never once confessed his love to a woman. He preferred first to build a story with them — a narrative. He would invent the events, weave them together, then push them patiently, with persistence, toward the climax. The plan did not always work. But when it did, they came to
.him — confessing, willing

to speak. The guesthouse received those who had come from far away, struck by misfortune and seeking resolutions; others who had caused a problem or been caught in one and were looking for a way out; those scorched by who had found no path but to take their beloved by force after her family refused the marriage; those in search of a livelihood; travellers passing through; storytellers, poets, singers, and even dancers. “It was a magical world,” he said, slowly, aloud “with stories that
 ”.answered to no logic

Even his sexual desire in early adolescence needed no explanation. It was enough to find himself alone by chance with a girl in one of the narrow agricultural lanes leading to the village — a village that looked out over five wide hills and four valleys, one of which held a running river. Then whatever happened, happened, in silence, with perhaps a few sighs. There was no need for him to speak first, or for her to. No need for persuasion, or preamble. She did not need it. He had no need to post a piece of eloquent wisdom, or a love poem, or to flex his muscles on Facebook. No need to follow her Instagram and drown her in likes, or send that labored yellow smiley embracing a red heart. She, in turn, had no for a selfie with pursed lips and heavy-lidded eyes and an Instagram bum. None of that was needed. They both knew that fate had brought them to this chance encounter, and that all they had to do was surrender to its authority of the moment. There surfaced suddenly in his clouded mind something the Hungarian writer Péter Nádas had written: “You get the feeling that life here does not consist of personal experiences...but of a deep keeping of silence.” Yes, they
 .had no need to speak

Narrative was an essential part of people’s lives — an organic extension of them. They lived inside it without knowing it existed, just as we live inside the Milky Way and can only imagine its shape, because we cannot see it as we see other galaxies. Even Leo, who had continued on his way after Mimi left him, lives through narrative — through instinct; the communication carried in patches of urine opens possibilities for him, steers him away from danger, keeps him alive. We humans too: narrative places us inside the world and gives us a position within it. In the village, stories were not told — they were lived. But we have since replaced living narrative with digital

again to sniff Mimi, but she pulled away and continued on her way. He was apparently no longer interesting enough. Leo did not seem to mind; he continued on his route, sniffing, carefully selecting the spots where he urinated — transmitting his messages, his condition, his mood, perhaps something like a three-dimensional image of the meal he had just eaten. The difference is that dogs communicate, narrate their lives, and display their states through and in nature — whereas we humans banished the stories, killed narrative and its possibilities, then we invented digital media and declared it, henceforth, the superior means of connection. He rarely used social media — it was a place full of noise. He had withdrawn from people years ago; he rarely found common ground for conversation. It had not always been this way. In his childhood, he lived in a small village in the far north-east of Syria, on the plains beneath the majestic Tur-Abdin, which spread across a vast expanse of Turkey and cross the border deep into Syria. Alexander the Great passed through here with his army of 50,000 on his way to face Darius and his 250,000 at the Battle of Gaugamela — a battle history would record as the greatest of Alexander’s victories. The Persian and Roman empires clashed in this region for hundreds of years. Timur passed through it after destroying Baghdad, on his way to Ankara. And thousands of years before them all, cities rose at Tell Halaf, Tell Arbid, Shagar Bazar, Tell Brak, and Urkesh — they flourished, expanded, and vanished. You could hardly overturn a stone in this region without finding a story beneath it. The spring rains and river floods were enough to push ancient coins and small clay seals —buried stories — up through the red soil, where plants and insects and
 .animals, and above all, where people thrived

There was no noise in the village. People listened more than they spoke. In the heart of the village — where all the houses faced south, towards the sun — and set apart from them, stood a mud-brick guest house with a grand staircase rising nearly two meters above the ground and led to a single, vast room: at least 20 meters long, ten meters wide, five meters high, perhaps more. It was the crown jewel of the village. The moment you climbed the stairs and passed through the great wooden door, you understand that you were here to listen —to be silent, not

For Byung-Chul Han, happiness is not a momentary event — not an Instagram photo, not a TikTok clip. Happiness has a long tail that reaches back into the past. It is not the child of chance; it feeds on every part of life. It doesn't have the shiny appearance portrayed by influencers on Instagram — it is more like the afterglow: that redness seen on the horizon just after sunset. And one loses one's happiness when one is swallowed by the whirlpool of .reality and its passing things

On the way back, at the intersection of a street named after the writer Arnold Zweig — who had sought refuge in Palestine during the Nazi years — and Trelleborger street, he turned right, and the Evangelical Church of Hope appeared closer and more imposing in its Art Nouveau architecture. The tower rises some fifty meters above the ground, ending in an octagonal section — the sacred geometric form — crowned by a dome, above which stands a lantern structure topped by a cross. The tower holds there bells weighing more than half a tonne, bearing three names: Faith, Love, and Hope. They ring on Sundays in a solemn, ceremonial rhythm. The faithful enter through the main portal, guarded by a triangle enclosing the eye of God, and above it three statues: at the centre, Christ, flanked by two angels. One of the angels was destroyed during the fierce fighting around the church in 1945 and has since been restored. To the left, Martin Luther holding the Bible. To the right is the Apostle Paul, his hand resting on a sword. He could not ignore the irony: he had come from the same region as the Apostle Paul, yet here he was regarded as a stranger, an intruder in the geography — .while statues of Paul were erected in churches

Geography was never merely a place. It has always been a space in which lives entangle. It has its own force and resonance — it is an idea, a memory charged with history. Geography is woven into the stories that create social cohesion, that offer meaning and carry values. Religions themselves are exemplary narratives — anchors for people's lives. Through religion, people locate their place .in this world

The Church of Hope draws few worshippers today. It was once a symbol of resistance in East Berlin — it had its own narrative. It served as an important cultural and social hub for youth movements and punk music that opposed the rigid GDR regime. In 1988, the church managed to stage a

communication on social media, where, as Byung-Chul Han says, the “community without communication gives way to communication without community.” Berlin severed the thread that had bound him to the village and replaced narrative with digital noise. He had lost the star .that had guided him — perhaps forever



المشهد كما تخيله الذكاء الاصطناعي

Leo grew calm — unusual for him. He probably had, Like some humans, attention deficit disorder and hyperactivity; his behaviour suggested as much. Yet now he walked close beside him, matching his pace exactly, turning his head upward now and then to look at him with a gaze of one who understands. Perhaps he sensed that his companion was troubled. He wondered to himself: “What does Leo think of me as a human being?” Nietzsche had once thought about this too, and said: “I fear that the animals consider man as a being like themselves that has lost in a most dangerous way its sound animal common sense; they consider him the insane animal, the laughing animal, the weeping animal, the miserable animal.” Was he truly miserable? Perhaps. Nietzsche also says: “I have given a name to my pain and call it ‘dog.’ It is just as faithful, just as obtrusive and shameless, just as entertaining, just as clever as any other dog—and I can scold it and vent my bad mood on it, as others do with .their dogs, servants, and wives



On Thursday, the third of December 1987, he was walking home before sundown when the military intelligence Chevrolet pickup drove past him in the town of Amuda, where his family had moved seven years earlier to continue his studies. This was 128 days before the Die Toten Hosen concert in the church courtyard. Suspicion crept in when he saw a masked man in the vehicle, but he pushed it aside and continued until he reached home. There he found his older brother waiting for him at the front door. He told him that their sister, who lived in Turkey, had sent a telegram — they had to go to the post office at once to collect it

It was a cold day, with scattered clouds, the sun was grazing the horizon on the west. He climbed the steps to the post office entrance slowly. He could have sworn a thousand voices were telling him not to. But he did. His older brother was worried enough about their sister — he led the way up the stairs without hesitation. They reached the empty post office hall; there was only one man there. He recognized him as the postal clerk, who asked his brother to wait, then led him quietly to a back door, and they descended together to a room on the lower floor. The head of the military intelligence unit was waiting. He nodded, and the clerk left, pulling the door shut behind him. He asked him to sit in the chair, and took his own seat behind a wide desk. He did not speak. He asked nothing. He did not smile. He avoided looking at him — though he was only a teenager, legally still a minor. He had no doubt received a severe reprimand from the director of the military intelligence branch in the nearby city of Qamishli, for failing to uncover the “conspiracy” this adolescent had supposedly been hatching to overthrow President Hafez al-Assad. It was the military intelligence division in Aleppo that had ultimately uncovered the “conspiracy” — and had in all likelihood reprimanded the Qamishli director in turn.

concert by the West German band Die Toten Hosen, smuggling them in on forged documents under the cover of the church cultural event, evading the tight grip of the Stasi. The concert took place in the church’s rear courtyard — the same courtyard where Leo habitually played, leapt about, and relieved himself. The crowd was small, but the symbolism was large: it gave young people a space to gather and express themselves freely. The band made no demands — only unlimited free beer and that the cost of whatever the youth destroyed in their small revolution would be covered

He too had his small revolution, when at fifteen, he joined a secret party whose members faced arrest and torture. The Communist Labor Party was an opposition movement in the 1980s that sought to overthrow the Syrian regime through a popular revolution. It was, in truth, a singular party — opposed everyone. It opposed dictatorial regimes, opposed the Soviet Union and Stalin, opposed China and Mao Zedong, opposed the Eastern European regimes and their socialist bloc, opposed religion, opposed the Nasserist nationalists, opposed Khalid Bakdash’s Communist Party, opposed Riyad al-Turk’s Communist Party, opposed the Muslim Brotherhood. It opposed everything — and yet it had a narrative. He still remembers the shiver that moved through his spine when he set out for a party comrade. All he knew was the place and time. He did not know what the person looked like, did not know the name, the address, the age or the sex. He had to go to a specific place at a specific hour carrying certain agreed signs and another person — also carrying signs — would come him, and they would exchange a secret question and answer to recognise each other. He went to these meetings as though he were going to meet a lover. The narrative that the party members had taken as their own bound them together and kindled something like love among them



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For forty years he believed that his father was domineering man. He had married four women and fathered twenty-three sons and daughters — and perhaps ten more who had not lived, dying in their early years. In the 1950s, he owned vast lands and entire villages. He had those who ploughed his fields, planted them, and brought in the harvest. He had those who tended his livestock. If he acquired enemies, he had those who would defend him — and if necessary, die for him. When he fell ill, the world turned upside down: his wives took turns in his bed to keep him warm. Even when he napped, someone would be massaging his head, two others rubbing his feet, and others rotating with hand fans in the heat until he woke. He was beloved by women — a single glance from him kept smiles on their lips through the whole night. Many women were convinced he did not relieve himself like ordinary people. He was a storyteller without equal: he would narrate and narrate, and silence would settle over everyone present, carrying them — mind and body — into worlds they would never have dreamed of reaching. Had he not been like this, he could not have managed the crises that came to him in his great mud-brick guesthouse. From the most tangled disputes — the kind men kill each other over — to the simplest troubles, he unravelled them with stories. Even hard men standing on the edge of violence would soften in his hands, twist, and surrender. His presence had an aura

In the last ten years before his death, the village lost its capacity for silence and listening. His aura began to fade

In Syria, people lived inside a chain of humiliation so long that by the time it reached ordinary citizens, the circle of humiliation had expanded to a scale the human mind .could scarcely conceive

Shortly after, some ten masked military intelligence agents entered the room — arriving from Qamishli in full military gear, carrying rifles and pistols, ammunition belts buckled tight around their waists. They ordered him to come with them, led him out of the building with rifles trained on his head, and pushed him into the vehicle amid shouts, before passersby in the street could take notice. He discovered that his brother was already inside. They had taken him as a precautionary measure — to prevent word of the arrest from leaking prematurely, or from stirring unnecessary commotion, particularly as they were planning to arrest others. They also knew that his father was one of the region's notable figures, and had no wish to provoke tribal or political sensitivities in the small, .predominantly Kurdish town

He had not admired his father, who died in a road accident three years before his arrest at sixty-three. His father had also suffered from heart trouble. He had been driving with four of his daughters, three of his younger sons, his wife, and his sister. No one knows how the accident happened. There was no collision with another vehicle, no blowout — the car simply lost control and overturned in a depression beside the road. Everyone escaped fractures, wounds, and bruises — except his father and aunt, who both died on that same day and in that same place. Theirs had been an exceptional bond; neither could go against the other's word. She used to say to him, "May God never afflict me with your absence," and he would reply, "May God never .afflict me with your absence." Fate had them die together

.shattering

But what struck deepest was the loss of narrative. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 then the Gulf War in 1991, dashed the narrative against the wall and stripped his .world of whatever magic it had held

When he came out of prison, the world around him had changed. It had become a world of many narratives: liberalism, neoliberalism, democracy, civil society, feminism, structuralism and post-structuralism, deconstruction, colonialism and post-colonialism, cultural studies, tribalism, sectarianism, Islamism — and so on. Narratives are not eternal; they are born, they grow, and they dissolve, but when they are lost, everyone searches .for alternatives

Uncertainty had spread so far that he once convinced a gathering of more than ten people that he was capable of flight. They followed him out into the courtyard to witness the miracle with their own eyes. He laughed that day until tears ran down his face and his stomach muscles could no longer hold him. Joy was not in his nature. He was drawn more to the German philosopher Ernst Jünger— the most prolific and the most eccentric — who once said: “Tell me
”!your relation to pain and I will tell you who you are

There was a global phobia of pain in the post-narrative age, Pain has been gradually expelled, to the point where the capacity to bear it has nearly vanished. It is no longer welcome — it has become algophobia. In the age of Instagram and TikTok, the age of perpetual happiness and unbroken achievement, pain has become a defect, a mark of weakness to be concealed. But not for him. He celebrated pain. Even during his prison years — and prison is by its very nature is a place of exclusion, removal, and rejection — he would choose the forgotten corner of the dormitory to lay out his mattress. Exclusion within exclusion. There he could feel pain in its nakedness. He would be seized by that primitive shudder that the philosopher Theodor Adorno described when one is struck by sight of primal beauty — that love which makes you love .all things at once. A life that banishes pain is a dull life

The pain still comes over him whenever he remembers that evening. He had dressed, left the house in Jisr al-Nahhas in Damascus, descended the short staircase, crossed the long corridor, then crossed the street to the

gradually, after he lost a large part of his holdings in the agrarian reform imposed the Syrian authorities on landowners. The aim was to Arabize the Kurdish-populated region: the land was confiscated and granted to newly settled Arab communities, uprooted from their lands along the Euphrates in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor and planted among the Kurdish villages. Neither the Arabs nor the Kurds were content — The Arabs had lost their own land, and the Kurds lost theirs. Each wanted to expel the other. Everyone competed against everyone, and the narrative fractured into smaller narratives — exclusionary, discriminatory — and with them, the community came .apart

He had indeed been afflicted with his father’s passion for narrative. Political action — in its truest sense — implicitly requires narrative. If an action cannot be narrated, it degenerates into mere contingent reaction. As Hannah .Arendt says

For action and speech, which, as we saw before, belonged close together in the Greek understanding of politics, are indeed the two activities whose end result will always be a story with enough coherence to be told, no matter how accidental or haphazard the single events and their .causation may appear to be

The narrative had brought him to the intelligence vehicle and to those rifles aimed at his head. Narrating by its nature demands listening — which means, necessarily the acknowledgment of the other. What was happening inside that vehicle was the opposite. It was shouting. It was .erasure

After six years, three months, and twenty-nine days he was released from prison. He had been beaten with open hands, with feet, with sticks, blindfolded throughout. He was put in the tire and struck with four-core cable that tore away pieces of skin. They threatened him with the “German chair,” — fortunately they did not carry it out. Some accounts hold that the German chair was one of the diabolical inventions of Alois Brunner, Adolf Eichmann’s right-hand in the Nazi camps. After Germany’s defeat in the Second World War, Brunner managed to flee and took refuge in Syria, where he became an resource to the Syrian intelligence. In the German chair, one feels your soul leaving the body drop by drop, and the spine

no explanation for his father's passion for storytelling except that he had been a man without hope. And when you lose hope, the obstructions in life multiply. The Danish writer Karen Blixen once said: "I am not a novelist. I am not even a writer; I am a storyteller...All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story." His father had indeed placed his sorrows into the stories he told. And now he too carried his sorrows — accumulated through the prison years — and stood before The sixth building, looking at the girl he loved: the girl who slipped her right hand into the back pocket of her jeans, laughed as she leaned her head tilted back and her chin lifted just enough to let the laughter out freely. She was unlike anyone else

He suggested they go to the university city cafeteria. It was quieter there, and a beer or two might give him bolder. They walked together. She was captivating. He had met her a year earlier, after moving to Damascus to study English literature. When he first saw her, she was a wild presence that sent a tremor through the body. They talked for a long time, about everything, and he drank as much beer as he could until he forgot the sentences he had memorised by heart. He did not know how to begin. From the start of their acquaintance he had been careful not to form too deep friendship with her. It is not easy to break the dynamic of a friendship and cross safely into love. They met sometimes in university gatherings — friends, but at a distance. Finally, he steadied himself and told her she was the girl he wanted to spend his life with. She was silent. He said, "You won't find anyone better than me," and knew immediately that what he had just said was clumsy. She seemed caught off guard —she had not expected this. The pain gripping him was more that he could bear; he steadied himself again and said, "I don't need an answer now, think about it," then he left. She remained silent

He walked home without direction; leaving her behind in the university city. He was tired, drained — yet filled with a calm that resembled what he had known in his forgotten corner of the prison dormitory. Either the story would end here and be complete, or it would continue from this point and open up new possibilities. In either case, he had set the wheel of life turning. He told his roommate not to wake him in the morning, went to his room, and slept

He was still under the effect of yesterdays' beer when the

other side, raised his hand to flag down a shared minibus on the northern ring road, climbed in, and spent the entire thirty-minute ride rehearsing what he would say — turning the sentences over once, then again, then a third time, then again. He got off at the Mouwasat Hospital stop, walked quietly toward the university city, hearing none of the street noise, seeing none of the people making it, showed his student card to the guard at the entrance, passed through, walked quietly eighty-five meters in a straight line, then turned right and walked quietly another hundred and forty meters in a straight line, until he stood before the sixth women's residential building, climbed the stairs, told the attendant he was a visitor and wanted to see her, descended the stairs, confirmed once more that the sentences were still present in his memory, waited while the attendant went up to tell her asking for her, sat on one of the benches facing the building and went through the sentences again. He watched the staircase, the people coming and going, his face unreadable — he was neither happy nor sad; he was afraid, trembling. The he saw her coming down the stairs smiling as she looked at him. Fifteen muscles in her face moved to form that smile, while more than five hundred thousand tiny arrector muscles rose across his body, sending the shiver through him. She was beautiful



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From childhood he had tended toward difference. He was the only one who rebelled against his father openly, while his brothers feared the man's authority. As he grew older, he no longer saw his father as domineering. He could find

He took her hand and drew her to the empty space at the centre of the room — he wanted her alone, without additions. She was uncertain, unsure of what she should do. He reached for toward the hollow at the base of her neck — that small triangle which is like a window onto what moves inside her chest. It rose with with her breath and fell, pulsed with the quickening of her heart. Touch released the tensions and obstruction; it restores things to .their proper place, and breathes life into this primal trust

He helped her out of her clothes, then stepped back to take in her body — then returned to explore its details: every angle, every curve, every muscle. He touched, smelled, tasted; pressed his ear to her chest to hear her heart —blood flowing from it, warm, in every direction. He lifted her onto the bed, kissing her neck, her chest, her armpits. She took him by the hair and put her mouth to his, pushing the air from her chest into his, then drawing the air from his chest into hers in a steady rhythm. She kissed his body, felt it, touched it. Her hand was a healer, releasing his pain. The hand that touches heals, as the voice that narrates heals. Touch creates trust and drives .out fear

Neither of them was afraid — at least not now. They spent the following two weeks naked in that same room, leaving it only to eat. They talked, laughed, and played; he read her Mahmoud Darwish's poetry and Gibran's The Prophet, :and they took turns in the Song of Solomon

.I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys

As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the .daughters

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow .with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste

He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner .over me was love

Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am .sick of love

His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth .embrace me

I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake

sounds in the house woke him. He opened his eyes with difficulty and found her standing in full splendour before his bed. Tall. Radiant. He leapt from the bed, struggling to open his eyes all the way. Yes, it was her — standing there, smiling, her gaze full of reproach. He did not know how to act. His thinking stopped entirely. He said: "Does this mean 'yes'?" She opened her long arms and drew him to her chest. He pulled back slightly and ran to his roommate — who had busied himself in the kitchen to give them their "privacy — leaping and shouting: "She said yes

He washed in the bathroom, rinsing away what remained of sleep and returned to find her sitting on the edge of the bed. He closed the door. She stood there, smiling, shy, looking him directly into his eye, confirming his presence. He held her, and she held him — each pressing the other, wanting to merge into a single body. He kissed her forehead, her eyes, her cheeks, her nose, her chin, then her lips, her teeth, her tongue. It was less a kiss than an exploration —pausing at each place, taking it in, touching it, smelling it, kissing it, running his tongue over it, storing the data in his memory, then moving on. Exactly as Leo does on his daily walks. He wasn't in a hurry. Neither was .she

They were experiencing life anew — an experience that made the narrating of life possible, without it, life would be bare. Only through narrative does life rise above its raw reality; narrative gives time meaning; gives it a beginning and an end. Without narrative, life becomes a matter of survival and nothing more — it ceases to be epic. Through narrative, the world enters a coherent order: it unifies events and things into a single story, however trivial, absurd, or contingent they appear. They were experiencing once more the things that, in their connectedness, had meaning — not isolation, but in .rhythm



Leo had broken down the social barriers that humans had built against other human who resembled them entirely — human who had lost the narrative that once bound them .together in a single story

Today's societies are built on information. Societies that know where you went, what you bought. Transparent societies. Naked societies. Societies that have severed themselves from narrative and become unstable — societies have lost their aura. The post-narrative age is an age without immersion, whose memory is digital, transient .and contingent

Unlike digital memory, which is based on accumulation and addition, human memory is narrative—it selects events, deleting some and foregrounding others, then connecting them together in different configurations, in infinite configurations. Narrative memory is built on gaps; .it is a memory capable of forgetting

The love story was never completed. They broke up after four years. They loved and hated. They agreed and quarrelled. They held each other close and drew apart — it had been worth it. Shortly after the broke up, he travelled to work in the Emirates. They did not meet again until chance brought them together seventeen years later. The war in Syria and the weight of life had worn her down, and her life had ceased to be a narrative. When narrative is no longer possible, wisdom deteriorates, and life becomes nothing but a bitter struggle — one problem solved only to .face another

Leo leapt and romped, trying to catch his attention — as he always did this when the walk neared its end, attempting to extend it as long as possible. A dog's life is short; every human year equals seven in a dog's life. But what is the point of a long life? The relationships that had held meaning — that denied the contingent, trivial nature of things — were dissolving before his eyes, against his will. His life had moved in every direction, shrouded at times in mystery and excitement, and at other times resembling .the hum that had not left his right ear for years

.my love, till he please

Then they would listen to music and make love again and .again; stopping only when sleep took them

Leo sensed the walk was nearing its end when they reached the great arch with its two rounded ends — resembling a closing quotation mark — that adorned the entrance bench of the Church of Hope. Quotation marks in language are puzzling. They signal trust when citing another's words verbatim, and signal doubt when you placing a term in brackets as a reservation about its credibility. Religions too are puzzling. The Church of Hope had its days of glory — its entrance with its lilac ceiling, pink walls, and pale grey columns, then the royal blue at the star-studded altar. The thirty-six angels inside the nave had witnessed multitudes who came, worshipped, asked God to forgive their sins, or to open a door to provision, or simply to draw near to Him in search of mercy — Then went on their way. The church that once gave a feeling of warmth and intimacy was no longer what it had .been

Leo made his way to his favoured spot at the rounded end of the arch and urinated there, leaving a message for the dogs that would come after him. Dogs weren't always dogs. Only twenty thousand years ago, humans carried out vast slaughters that wiped out the large animals, leaving only brown bears and wolves, who found the opportunity to mate and multiply, spreading across the earth until they were brought to contact humans. Some discovered that the food humans left behind had a taste worth the effort. They began drawing closer, trying to understand him, until they shed their nature as wolves and became domesticated dogs. They did not have to change much of their biological nature. They simply learned to understand humans better and adopted their expression. They learned from humans to show anger, anxiety, pain, and grief, and became capable of communicating with them more than the animals biologically closer to humans. They became .human companions

When he came to Germany as a refugee in 2012, he found it difficult to make contact with Germans. Leo opened the door wide: he now knew all the dogs in the neighbourhood, and their owners, who would approach him readily to talk about their beautiful, captivating dogs.

المشهد كما تخيله الذكاء الاصطناعي



عن هذه النسخة

هذه نسخة PDF من مقالة نُشرت في موقع «المحرر». النص والصور كما هي في المقالة الأصلية.

«Lost in Narratives» — مَآ كَتَبَتْ · بقلم رشاد عبد القادر · ٢٦ آب ٢٠٢٤

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