

Oral

by Rula Jurdi

I take back all the shades
I made in the city: coffin lids,
loud almond trees,
a white monotony, so beautiful,
a sea on the lip, devastating,
hair, continuous in desire

I was small enough to know
the tyranny of place, spiral pasts
they call civil war and the texture
of soft time; children were expected
to have edible memories, to eat them
all and play again with their enemies

Manara fills up with echoes of
lenient shoes, heavy shoes,
watering the shade, curving the *corniche*
Cafés lengthen cigarette gestures in Hamra,
history evicts heart words, the palm
of a tiny hand, arching
like a Damascene orange,
losing its peel for well-bred pennies

They invalidate a first date in Zaytouna,
too lovesick to treat it as a shyness,
too literal to see the rain migrate
with all its belongings
Only in the city, they are the taste
of their own quivering elbow pits,
the strength of shrapnel wounds

The Wardiyya church is fragile,
the flesh of a fortunate persimmon
I rest my head under the ripples of its
dome as they allow other vaults to nestle
Why is history scripted against restful heads,
the usual, the natural speed of memory?

Mouhyi, the fisherman from Caracas,
is as mute as his scars,
and fluent like the Palamida fish
The city he had forgotten is oral again,
sited where the mouth is,
unharmd like salt
The moon kicks through the wars,
unyielding, a full-bodied blood,
and the sea collects all Syrian limbs,
their contrasts, their gaps,
to be eloquent again