

MELIKA SALIHBEG BOSNAWI

AN AMERICAN IN BOSNIA

*A timid gazelle,  
already fatally wounded,  
ran away.  
So did Fawad, but he for good.*

Neither could my dear, never-met, brother in faith,  
an American,  
Fawad Ali,  
may God accept his sacrifice!  
understand, to what sort of people and land he had  
come.

A huge rucksack on his back,  
dozens of letters from family members  
who escaped in the nick of time,  
allegedly enclosing green American bank-notes as  
urgent help,  
several other thousand dollars collected by himself  
in his Saint Louis,  
for the most needy.  
Determined,  
first,  
to imprison,  
for good,  
within wed-lock,  
all humiliation and pains suffered by a violated

innocent  
Bosnian  
girl.  
I'm an American!  
said he  
self-confidently  
just to conquer his tremor  
as he got on board a Sarajevo bus  
at the Zagreb Station.  
And set himself by an Italian-journalist-looking  
Iranian,  
whose passport,  
believed my brother Fawad,  
would be spat on,  
by this nation,  
encouraged,  
on a daily basis,  
from the very start of her ordeal,  
by her Leader,  
to keep staring at the sky,  
instead of defending herself.  
For:  
the American jets are just about to appear on the  
horizon,  
and drop their explosive babies  
on the Chetniks'  
heavily armed  
military posts, growing like mushrooms on the  
sides of the hills and mountains, encircling the  
Bosnian cities.  
Sarajevo first.  
Which mountains,  
during the time of brotherhood and unity,

the people, now firing at each other,  
used to climb together:  
for sport,  
a picnic  
or a good booze-up.  
So, his American passport,  
he was waiting for it,  
had to be immediately kissed.  
The opposite was an initial shock.  
Don't worry! addressed him,  
with comforting words,  
his Iranian fellow-traveller.  
A strategy-expert who added frankly:  
Iran and America are not  
in the least  
so distant  
as a non-professional might think.  
Just push a knitting needle through the school-  
globe  
and you'll see:  
it will go into the ball through the gut of the United  
States,  
and come out,  
on the other side,  
through the stomach of Persia the Great.  
What now follows is just by the way:  
the Iranian was set on fire in his homeland when  
he refused to replace, in his heart, mind and work,  
Islâm Itself  
with the Islamic Cause,  
fixed up by the Iranian regime fixers.  
As for Fawad,  
quite true!

neither did he come to Bosnia on his President's  
orders.

He was not a member of any Benevolence,  
he didn't announce his visit in any paper,  
he was just a Fawad Ali.

A Muslim,  
a successful computer expert,  
software programmer;  
good marketing, ambitious plans, slight Pakistani-  
origin complex, bright future...

He came right from his Missouri, bounded not  
with any other bounds but with love for his  
Bosnian  
religious  
and every upright human  
fellows.

As the bus kept still on the last secure Igman  
plateau swearing  
it won't move any further downward  
because of the excessive risk  
of being shot  
from below  
by a drunken Ilidja poet and teacher...  
Fawad got off,  
and...

Oh, God! from where did,  
all of a sudden,  
all this crowd of old men,  
and teenagers,  
emerge?

And what are they trying to do with my luggage?  
These letters are not for them.  
The money is in my pouch.

This insignificant food-reserve is just for me,  
nothing special,  
several American halal-meat cans,  
Chinese instant-soups,  
some vitamins and pain-killers,  
so as not to cost  
this agonised nation  
a single meal or medicine  
during my stay in her country.  
What are these people grasping at?  
He rescued somehow his rucksack but understood  
not  
before he started rolling down the slippery  
mountain's side,  
along with his weighty bag,  
through the mud and slush and silence of the  
smooth movements of those  
whom he'd believed not to be able  
to keep themselves  
erect.  
And now carrying,  
on their feeble shoulders,  
the massive luggage-baggage of those who've just  
arrived with him from the outside world.  
As well trained,  
quick movements,  
not a single fall,  
instinct of life is more skilled than instinct of death,  
and Rubiov decided to restart speaking  
with the mortal.  
Down,  
in Butmir,  
a Sarajevo suburban safe-zone,

in the same silence,  
the icy rustle of German notes,  
10 DM, in a whisper, per piece,  
or whatever you give, uncle! auntie! Mister!  
thanks!  
Not shocked..., it was just the sharpest pain ever  
felt in his heart.  
It probably began at that moment,  
his death within...  
To whom have gone,  
oh God!  
all those sums, collected during numberless rallies  
organised throughout the American continent?  
All those life-saving dollars, given away for the  
starving Bosnians...?  
But Fawad endured once again.  
A Muslim must have *bushriqan*,  
a good opinion about people or things unless  
proved otherwise,  
he reminded himself of an Islamic principle.  
These are refugees from the just lost...  
Town and village names sound strange to me,  
but what's close, close...  
is  
that their fathers are on the battle-fields,  
or in the concentration camps...  
which are not,  
no way!..  
announced  
*urbi et orbi*  
the Hunter  
on return to his Vienna base...,  
mothers are inventing food for midnight dinners,

the owners of the refugee-packed houses are ever  
more wrathful,  
soldiers are looking for pretty girls,  
the abusive smell of alcohol is mixing with fresh  
blood spots on the virgin snow, shining under a  
pen-lamp's light,  
the future martyrs' figures are looming out of the  
dark hole;  
halting,  
each,  
within the roughly cut  
wooden  
frame  
of the improvised entrance,  
for a flash:  
a last photo of the whole figure to be taken by an  
incidental glance before it gets decomposed  
in the fading memory of all those  
a part of whose lives he used to be once,  
or in the faceless war statistics,  
or in a piece of the stone, backing  
colourlessly  
the main beautifully patterned figure in a historical  
mosaic  
in which  
nobody would ever  
recognise  
him,  
or in the grave, grave...  
Fawad,  
numbed with the cold and anguish,  
along with other hundreds, was waiting for hours  
to get permission to enter the underground tunnel;

dug beneath the city's Airport.  
The only opening through which the Bosnian  
capital was kept alive;  
for a full four years.  
And as he finally got in  
with the help of the Iranian's pass-word,  
he immediately lowered himself.  
Forced to do so by the size of the damp muddy  
passage,  
as were forced to do many a one  
who'd never before bent either in prayer to God.  
But he bowed down even more than necessary;  
in shame.  
Not to see:  
the tunnel was crowded,  
not with all those countless wounded who were  
more and more desperately waiting to be  
transported  
abroad!  
abroad!  
if not by the UN aircraft carriers,  
for that is required  
a relative,  
brother, or sister, or a ...,  
occupying the post of ...,  
or a tough,  
mighty,  
*Speciality of the Sarajevo office!*  
lady-secretary,  
or...,  
a dog, at least, guarding the Ruling Party's,  
just being built,  
in the midst of warfare,



new headquarters,  
if not then to be transported somewhere by the  
humanitarian relief carrying planes, then  
at least  
by these mine-trolleys.  
Fixed in, crippled, frozen, hopeful,  
and pushed,  
through this dark mouth which is terrifying babies  
who're then crying when everything should be  
deadened the UN tanks full of enemies parading  
between their two territories are just now passing  
over our heads,  
the drops of rain...  
By the mine-trolleys then,  
pushed  
farther!  
farther!  
to...  
where to?  
wherever!  
just away!  
from the four hospital walls; for years,  
away!  
from the cycle; fresh hopes, dead hopes,  
away!  
from the ring, cycled by the rival doctors and their  
rival political masters,  
away!  
from the mind and body pains,  
away!  
from being a medical case for the easy-done PhDs.,  
away!  
from your own maimed monologue:

had not I gone that day...  
hadn't I...  
andn't...  
I...  
if only death comes!  
By the mine-trolleys then,  
pushed through the tunnel,  
on the way out of the detained city of Sarajevo  
to...  
?  
wherever,  
just away!  
transported by the mine-trolleys,  
pushed by their mothers,  
or sisters,  
or foreign brothers-in-law,  
or wives and kids,  
and then carried,  
before the crack of dawn,  
up the slippery side of snowy Igman,  
by the same  
amateurish  
family  
medical  
personnel.  
Instead of such an echelon of Tunnel passengers,  
whom,  
soon after, Fawad found to be filling Sarajevo's  
bombarded  
clinics,  
in place of them brutally sobered up,  
the passage of life was blocked with mine-trolleys;  
drunk with alcoholic beverages,

and pregnant with black-market goods,  
and escorted with a barrage of blasphemies against  
God,  
Oh God!  
Out of which text,  
fortunately,  
my late brother Fawad Ali,  
an American,  
may God forgive him and beautify his eternal  
abode!  
could understand but God's name.  
The rest was obvious from the context.  
I don't know their language!  
tried, probably, to comfort himself  
a polite,  
pious,  
American guy,  
I must have *busnizan*.  
They are only praising the Almighty,  
while asking His favour,  
and their rude faces and behaviour are just an  
outcome of their untold suffering.  
That's how he endured once more, and set his foot  
in the city of Sarajevo.  
A modern rosary in his hands  
purchased during pilgrimage to Mecca,  
and counting,  
upon a finger-push,  
his endless *dhikr*  
to the Only Owner of life,  
and end.  
A sack full of letters touring the city  
struck round the clock,

from shelter to shelter,  
from ruin to ruin,  
from home to home,  
to animate devastated faces,  
he did not find it difficult.  
But to understand how disappeared,  
the very first day,  
all those American greenbacks - he couldn't.  
He still asked God to forgive these people  
who unbearably suffered.  
Saint Louis sympathy and money donors would  
forgive them too.  
He probably said to his God:  
No, my Originator,  
in Whose hand is my being and my naught,  
I did not come here for the sake of these few  
pickpockets and pilferers and black market robbers  
in whose hands finishes  
half the humanitarian aid.  
He,  
a clean-soul,  
did not know  
that the other half  
used to disappear  
in the hands  
of some  
...  
&  
their kinfolk  
&  
their partners  
&  
their partners' own kinsmen

&

the partners kin's own *strine i kemine*.

Forgive me, dear reader, for this untranslatable  
 Bosnian syntagm of the human villainy!  
 Never mind!  
 said my brother Fawad,  
 I still have the rest of the country to visit,  
 I've got my holy goal,  
 to protect,  
 with my wed...  
 He met her soon,  
 and felt in love at once.  
 Graceful, shivering gazelle!  
 He said straight what he wanted,  
 she was eager to accept.  
 No! said a local hoja,  
 pride-brimming,  
 provincial dignitaries-encircled,  
 no my daughter,  
 I wouldn't recommend it!  
 He is from afar.  
 He is a foreigner.  
 Who knows anything about his family,  
 plus,  
 he may defile your religion.  
 Just look...! What's that Iranian doing with him?  
 He may be of his creed...  
 Well yes true! that's all perfectly all right! Iranian  
 food and medicine and clothes and all that money  
 for the pilgrimages and tours and conferences...  
 that is all most welcome! and as for army supplies?  
 oh most true! had it not been for the Iranian  
 weapons there would not be Bosnia!

Who to care about *chadori*<sup>1</sup> Iranian ladies  
 collecting,  
 at the same time,  
 in the sacred Qom,  
 that ocean of knowledge,  
 their living from the market's trash?!  
 Who to mind if an Iranian *mahjuba*<sup>2</sup> has to work  
 half a year  
 to afford a *manto*,<sup>3</sup>  
 that her Bosnian "sister",  
 preferring her mini skirt,  
 chucks out,  
 the Iranian government gift,  
 as soon as she finishes her war-visit to the  
 mahjubas,  
 world-imprisoned,  
 state?!  
 Who to be worried about Iranian masses  
 who have to work a full year  
 to pay the operations for their critically ill children,  
 or have to beg, beg...?!  
 Who to believe that generals of the holy *Sepah*,  
 (just not the honest,  
 the awakened)  
 are fighting now in Bosnia

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<sup>1</sup> Chador is an Iranian style of Muslim women's clothing, while the word chadori is the **attribute**.

<sup>2</sup> Designation for a Muslim woman who observes the Islamic code of covering herself.

<sup>3</sup> A mantle.

<sup>4</sup> Designation for a Muslim without praise or abuse, but the Islamic code of covering herself as a form of address.

<sup>3</sup> A mantle.

their second revolution?!  
 With the slogans, re-designed:  
     Not for Islâm!  
     But Maslahât!  
 With new goals in their views:  
     1,000  
     green  
     American dollars  
     a month;  
 their annual income - at home!  
     And all this together,  
 all that huge Bosnian bill to be paid from the  
     Iranian  
     *baytu'l-mâl.*  
 That is, the people's funds.  
     All this is quite good,  
 concluded the local hoja, sharing nothing with  
     honourable Shaykh Sirrî,  
 the Slave of The All Compassionate,  
     may God grant him forgiveness!  
 but the same blueness of the sky over the city of  
     Fojnica.  
 Equally cerulean as if there were not the span of  
 two hundred years between a hoja of this time of  
     ignorance,  
 and an XVIII-XIX century real Muslim divine,  
     Shaykh 'Abdu'r-Rahmân Sirrî,  
     who wrote in ecstasy:  
*If the Lord takes His word from everything,  
 all things would lose their forms;  
 become non-existence.*  
     Above all,

added Fawad's non-destined religious-marriage-  
 ceremonial master,  
 haven't they been saying to us,  
     *bolan!*<sup>4</sup>  
 our leaders,  
 time and again,  
 during closed Party sessions,  
*Let's take from them more than possible,*  
     *and then,*  
     *at the proper time,*  
     *fight them,*  
*for they've been corrupting our religion?*  
     For,  
     *unlike us,*  
*they've been doing nothing but building castles in the air!*  
 Said D◻ emal, the Fragile,  
 said Ned◻ ad, the Half-Witted,  
 said Hasan, the Underhanded,  
 a would-be saviour of my homeland.  
 Yâ Haidâr, let me cry with you, leaning against the  
 wall of Medina's Bâqî´a burial ground;  
     a beating heart...!  
     To resume,  
     uttered the local hoja,  
     unexpectedly authorised,  
     by whom?  
 to decide about the fortune of the girl for whom,  
     till that crucial moment of the war,  
     he absolutely did not care.  
     Nor did those around him.

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<sup>4</sup> In Bosnian: a word without precise meaning but very often used in a colloquial language as a form of address.



I would never give you in marriage with my own  
hand to one who believes in fourteen perfect...

I say, No!, No!, full-stop!

A timid gazelle,  
already fatally wounded,  
ran away.

So did Fawad, but he, for good.

A real Bosnian martyr,  
may God grant him His forgiveness,  
and accept his offering!

Broken.

To spoil her religion? argued he,  
silently,

on his way back to America.

What religion at all has she been taught by them,

sitting,

kingly,

in the niches of their mosques,

and waiting for people to come to them and

express their reverence?

As if their Prophet,

blessing and peace be upon him and his purified  
progeny!

had not given them a perfect example,

walking streets,

and cross-roads,

and markets,

and mixing themselves with people,

and being hungry with them,

and paying them a visit when sick,

and defending them when wronged and deprived,

and supporting them when arrested and tortured,

how to call them,

from darkness,  
 to the light?!  
 What does she know about Islâm apart from her  
 Muslim name,  
 for even which little she had to pay with her  
 innocence?!  
 By whom have they been commissioned to advise a  
 lost injured antelope what direction to go,  
 when it took them,  
 the religious judges,  
 full six months to make a decision concerning  
 both:  
 the violated Bosnian females,  
 and their unwanted babies, the innocent fruit of  
 this war's greatest crimes?  
 Why did they wait for so long?  
 As if God's Perfect Religion was not revealed 14  
 centuries ago,  
 as if ever since no single Muslim woman was raped,  
 as if they were not given by God the power of  
 reasoning,  
 as if God's Perfect Law was not alive,  
 just re-animated during their war-session,  
 as if...  
*Girls and women are not to be blamed!*  
 announced his verdict the then Bosnian religious  
 head,  
 the râ'îs,  
 after a long six months.  
*And as for babies? Well..., better to give them away!*  
 To whom?  
 Oh.....God!  
 And what for?

To be sold on the black market for kids where  
these blameless victims of politics blasphemy and  
alcohol would arrive branded  
as those African children  
on their foreheads  
with signs:  
this one to survive as a whole,  
that one just through his/her heart,  
or kidney,  
or brain,  
in the bodies of the sick children  
of the world's affluent.  
A timorous antelope disappeared.  
So will Fawad, but he for good.  
They were anxious about who I was and to where I  
might take her.  
Are they worried likewise about where will be taken  
that line of naked bodies parading on the Sarajevo  
platform,  
raised by the woman-flesh merchants,  
for the beauty-queen competition,  
at the same time as deadly crashes of countless  
grenades are taking their  
massive  
portions.  
And rows and rows of Bosnia's  
most charming boys are filling,  
like spring flower young grass,  
Nad-Kovači cemetery.  
Till only yesterday their park,  
with whose ancient  
stony  
residents

they used to play foot-ball matches:  
life-hood against death-hood.

Or game:  
hide-and-peek.

Fawad decided to endure no more.

But before he left,  
forever,  
he tried

once more

to say  
all his pains,  
directly,

into my fingers,

which are now turning into script

the Bosnian

War

Rhymes.

Of whose

*Lâ ilâha illallâh,*

*Hallelujah,*

*Alleluia,*

Fawad knew,

he'd also been a tone.

He sent me a faxed invitation to visit him in Saint

Louis, providing everything according to the

American Visa Section requirements:

a well-off sponsor,

American war-veteran,

prestige address,

phone and fax,

reason for visit,

all...

*To whom it may concern!*

A guy working at the American Visa section in  
     Istanbul,  
 my and Fawad's hoodoo,  
 did not feel concerned.  
     *Get her, she looks like a cat!*  
 a puppy-woof laugh at the photo in the Bosnian  
 passport, turning it towards his colleague.  
     *You look like a refugee!*  
 said he in the highest democratic style,  
     *We won't grant you a visa!*  
 he added, turning his disdainful face towards Black  
     Muslim garb.  
 The same one was called in,  
     only six years before,  
 by the then head of the Section,  
     personally.  
*You must have suffered tremendously in your (socialist)*  
*country. Have a nice time in the United States!*  
 Multiple year-valid admittance to an America in a  
     cold war with Communism.  
     These are other times.  
 The communist ghost's sunk in his glass,  
 another ghost's been wandering the globe;  
     the soul of Fawad Ali's dīn.<sup>5</sup>  
 An American's, who possibly said to his God:  
     Now, I have enough, my Lord!  
 I've fought my wars, both American and Bosnian,  
     and got fatally wounded.

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<sup>5</sup> Islām is not properly understood if the term religion is applied to it in the Western sense. Dīn is a qur'anic untranslatable designation of God-revealed religion, comprising all aspects of life and the world, unlike the word in use, which covers only man's relation to the Creator.

I'm choosing now being with You,  
my Eternal Lord!  
rather than running,  
as much as a glimpse more,  
after this exquisite,  
but transient,  
Creation of Yours.  
A car accident took away a Bosnian,  
and American,  
martyr,  
Fawad Ali,  
as a finger-push device counted his endless  
invoking of God.  
May he be received with grace!



A chapter from  
SARAJEVO ROSE / WAR RHYMESS

