

Stranger on the bank, like the river . . . tied up to your name
by water. Nothing will bring me back from my free distance
to my palm tree: not peace, nor war. Nothing
will inscribe me in the Book of Testaments. Nothing,
nothing glints off the shore of ebb and flow, between
the Tigris and the Nile. Nothing
gets me off the chariots of Pharaoh. Nothing
carries me for a while, or makes me carry an idea: not promises,
nor nostalgia. What am I to do, then? What
am I to do without exile, without a long night
staring at the water?

Tied up
to your name
by water . . .
Nothing takes me away from the butterfly of my dreams
back into my present: not earth, nor fire. What
am I to do, then, without the roses of Samarkand? What
am I to do in a square that burnishes the chanters with moon-shaped
stones? Lighter we both have become, like our homes
in the distant winds. We have both become friends with the clouds'
strange creatures; outside the reach of the gravity
of the Land of Identity. What are we to do, then . . . What
are we to do without exile, without a long night
staring at the water?

Tied up
to your name
by water . . .

Nothing's left of me except for you; nothing's left of you
except for me — a stranger caressing his lover's thigh: O my
stranger! What are we to do with what's left for us
of the stillness, of the siesta that separates legend from legend?
Nothing will carry us: not the road, nor home.
Was this road the same from the start,
or did our dreams find a mare among the horses
of the Mongols on the hill, and trade us off?
And what are we to do, then?
What
are we to do
without
exile?

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MAHMOUD DARWISH IN 1984. Photo Jean Mohr.