

WALKING THROUGH FIRE

by
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Based on Nawal El Saadawi's autobiography of the same name.

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ACT 1

EXT. DOWNTOWN CAIRO STREET - EVENING

Hard-bitten pigeons rummage through a pile of rubbish on a grubby pavement.

An urban aviary, choreographed by the city sounds of a street getting ready for sundown prayer.

The last verses of adhan (Muslim singing prayer) are heard; an eery reverberation sang from tannoy speakers somewhere away from unknown sources.

Pigeons peck into a piece of stale bread, fighting for the crumbs. A red can topples; its liquid flowing towards the street's drain - The prayer song now dissolving into ardent speech -

CAPTION: CAIRO 1992

TANNOY (V.O.)

... Let their blood flow, kill the enemies of Allah. Only their death will clean their spirit. You shall not be wronged. The prophet said: Muster against them all the men and cavalry at your disposal so that you can strike terror into the enemies of Allah. Allah knows them. And remember, whatever you spend for the cause of Allah shall be repaid to you...

Over this: A majestic Egyptian seagull makes its entrance. Its feathers are proud as it walks across the pavement like a conqueror, triumphantly carrying the dry piece of bread.

The pigeons flee the scene, flying up towards their night shelters under the roofs of bare brick buildings.

We travel up with them -

Until the street is revealed through Cairo's haze of smoke and dust.

TANNOY (V.O.)

... Kill them, for their words and actions defame our prophet. If you don't kill them, they won't be stopped, and you will be as guilty as them in the eyes of Allah...

Down below, INHABITANTS OF CAIRO skirt around discarded furniture parked chaotically around sleeping cars. Wary faces are walking, vanishing like ghosts into the falling night.

We rise further -

Windows appear into view, warm lights cutting through the city grey.

TANNOY (V.O.)

... They poison all they touch and hide their blasphemies under innocent children's book covers. Kill Sayyid Al-Qemany. Burn his words of blasphemy. He is an instrument of the Devil. Kill Naguib Mahfouz. Let the blood fall to his hands and drown all the words of poison he writes. Kill Nasr Hamed Abu Zaid. Let his blood flow. He is a heretic and the enemy of Allah...

Perched over one of the windows, A WOMAN, worried, looks out into an ominous Cairo.

TANNOY (V.O.)

... Kill Nawal El Saadawi. She is inciting women to disobey Allah. The veil is sacred. Women like her deserve only death...

The woman straightens her neck. A proud neck that refuses to go to the hangman's rope. This is NAWAL EL SAADAWI (60's). A mane of white hair intensifies the piercing of her dark eyes. She is holding a pen.

She shuts the window.

But the VOICE continues.

INT. NAWAL'S APARTMENT - EVENING

A study room lined with books. Floor to ceiling, left to right. A desk adheres to one of the walls. More books are piled, some of them bearing her name.

An old phone - from which a depleted umbilical cord of a cable stretches towards a socket by the window wall.

Nawal is standing there. Alert, immobile, eyes wide open. She grasps her pen with her fist like her life hangs on it.

That voice. Faintly but devastatingly urgent repeats its deadly command name after name.

Nawal's husband, SHERIF (60's), enters the room. He is tall, shoulders slightly bent.

SHERIF

What's wrong?