

# My Father and the Figtree

For other fruits my father was indifferent.  
He'd point at the cherry trees and say,  
"See those? I wish they were figs."  
In the evenings he sat by my bed  
weaving folktales like vivid little scarves.  
They always involved a figtree.  
Even when it didn't fit, he'd stick it in.  
Once Joha was walking down the road  
and he saw a figtree.  
Or, he tied his camel to a figtree  
and went to sleep.  
Or, later when they caught and arrested him,  
his pockets were full of figs.

At age six I ate a dried fig and shrugged.  
"That's not what I'm talking about!" he said.  
"I'm talking about a fig straight from the earth—  
gift of Allah!—on a branch so heavy it touches the ground.  
I'm talking about picking the largest fattest sweetest fig

in the world and putting it in my mouth.”  
(Here he'd stop and close his eyes.)

Years passed, we lived in many houses, none had figtrees.  
We had lima beans, zucchini, parsley, beets.  
“Plant one!” my mother said, but my father never did.  
He tended garden half-heartedly, forgot to water,  
let the okra get too big.  
“What a dreamer he is. Look how many things he starts  
and doesn't finish.”

The last time he moved, I had a phone call,  
my father, in Arabic, chanting a song I'd never heard.  
“What's that?”  
“Wait till you see!”

He took me out to the new yard.  
There, in the middle of Dallas, Texas,  
a tree with the largest, fattest, sweetest figs in the world.  
“It's a figtree song!” he said,  
plucking his fruits like ripe tokens,  
emblems, assurance  
of a world that was always his own.

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