

The Birds Shall Return

After Fadwa Tuqan

Does anyone know what to do with the knowledge
that catastrophe and existence unite too many to count?
Can your guest room fit a family of four and
everything they've scavenged?

Does the good green land drink water or only red wine?
Is your belly full? Is the soil in your backyard quenched?
Have you spotted a laughter-filled home anywhere?
When was the last time you saw a sister smile?

I know nothing of the fear of tomorrow,
the razor-sharp line between joy and pain,
the power of innumerability,
the promised devastation that all great hurricanes bring.

What a privilege it is to lose count of things.
When does the life of a tree with birds in its boughs
watered by blood and toil, start and end?
When will the birds return?

Shaken by every hour,
where is the coffee to mix with the rubble?
Where is the ancient clock that tells the time?
When will the birds return?

There's grief and heaviness to spare but
what we know of horizons is their promise
for the troubled and martyred.
When will the birds return?

There will come a day when phantoms
are replaced by feet and feet and feet
returning as the ancient clock calls to the great trunk,
the sturdy roots. The birds shall return.

Grandmothers will sweep debris to make room
in the kitchen for peace and the fragrance of olives

as we bear witness to the flock.
The birds shall return.