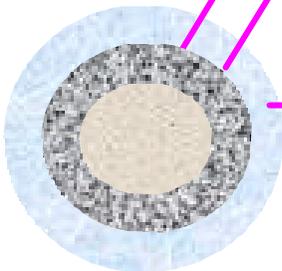
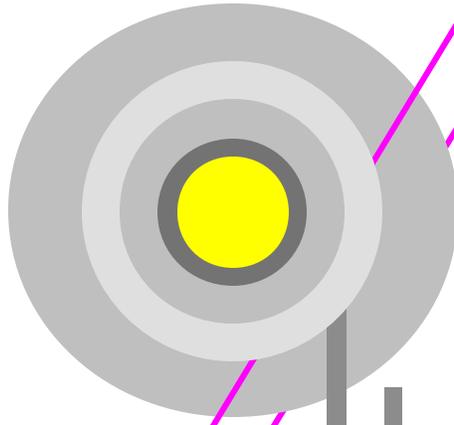


The Fly





The Fly

By: Hamdan Dammaj *
Translated By: Mona Al-Alami

Thousands of difficult moments had passed without mercy. He had spent the entire morning searching the truth but, in vain. He knew completely that he wouldn't be able to escape to the outside, where there was a world full of light and freedom; a world he could see clearly from behind that damned invisible barrier. He grew helplessly sick of the sudden pangs of fear which struck him every time he hit the "invisible" barrier. That barrier remained a mystery, not only to him but to the entire fly population. He had once heard about it from one of his friends, but he never imagined it to be that mysterious and daunting.

His flying became confined to a small space so that he no longer circled freely in the air as he used to. He was unable to fly, "like a contemptible louse", he thought to himself ashamedly, as he stuck his bruised face against the closed window of the bedroom in house number 32 in the old *Itha'ah* neighbourhood.

"What a disaster! Do I have to die the way the cockroaches die?" asked the anxious voice within him. He had cried endlessly since morning. He could not remember how he fell in that "trap", all he recalled was that he was just happily musing in the air after a hearty meal from the neighbour's kitchen when ...

"You shouldn't have closed your eyes when flying you ..." He angrily told himself as his steamy tears trickled down his face mixing with the filthy sweat of his body, which he used to customarily cleanse with his quick, sharp gestures.

His memory took him a few days back, when he was still young, to the moment when he had witnessed the death of a cockroach. "It was a horrid scene," the memory of which shook him fiercely and remained vivid in his mind throughout his short life. That scene instilled more fear into him than that of being swallowed by a frog... He had just come back from a morning meal with his comrades when he heard faint whines which made him shudder nearly losing balance.

The giant cockroach was lying on his back with his spiked limbs swaying in the air with a disgusting agility. As he lay on his back, crying out for help, the place became filled with the smell of death. It wasn't long before the first of the ants could be seen from a distance.

"No, I can't die like that," he shook his head as he tried to shut the horrible thoughts away. He rather preferred to die a "natural death", like his tribe's chief who had just died five hours ago after long life, choking on his final meal. How he would have liked to die in a mass slaughter together with his fellow flies, suffocating on poisonous gas, rather than to die alone and on his back, like a cockroach!



After resting awhile, he was able to clear off the remaining sweat on his wings. He resumed his work, once again meticulously searching the vastness of the window, for an opening through which he could escape. Whilst he was lost at work, great ideas began to caress his small mind. Feelings of hope and desire began to emerge from within him. “Yes, everything would soon be over,” he reassured himself as his wings fluttered against the solid window pane, producing a hollow noise.

Unable to withstand the pain and exhaustion, he lost balance and his frail body fell to the pit of the window pane. Despite his exhaustion, images of a bright future still flowed in his mind. No, he wouldn't give up, he can't give up. He would fly again, he would be free to embrace the endless skies. When he's free again, he would start a brand new life. He would no longer linger in the airs of this depressing house, but he would visit all the garbage sights in the city and see new things he had never seen before. Of course he would take extra care not to be entrapped by the invisible barriers and surely he wouldn't die on his back, like the cockroaches, but he would die the way the chief of his tribe had died, choking on his final meal. Who knows? Maybe one day he would become a chief himself. In fact “I will become a chief” he thought to himself and ... and ...

Whilst he was drowning in his wishful thoughts, he felt sleep taking over his entire body and before blissfully closing his posterior eyes, a thick hand had landed on him. He could feel through the darkness strong fingers closing on him, tightening their grip on his body, before they crushed him, and all his great thoughts.

Everything faded away rapidly from around him, the skies, the light, the freedom and his friends. He realised that it was the end but he was still happy. A content smile spread on his weary face as he silently remembered, in that instant, that he would not die the way the cockroaches die.

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- Hamdan Dammaj (b.1974) was born in Ibb, Yemen. He is currently pursuing his Higher Degree in Computer and Information Science at the University of Reading, England. Coming from a family of literary tradition, Dammaj had an early start at writing poetry and short stories. “**The Fly**”, the first of Dammaj's short stories to be translated into English, has upon publication received much literary attention.
 - Mona Al-Alami, a linguistics specialist currently working in the field of translation in UAE.