

Poems

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Erez Crossing

Pigeons nest in iron rafters above the crossing, building a resting place with stubble collected from bulldozed fields of olive, roadside weed and tufts of grass, from feathers shed when they make love and their wings beat against corrugated air. Below them is the corridor of Erez, at gunpoint, a theatre of concrete block, metal and steel wire coiled and twisted onto spikes and stakes, marking the passage. Soldiers play the part of high school drama students, nervous and bored, dressed for combat in outfits of lead, trapped in the narrow confines of their prison yard. They pace under the full throttle of the sun, while feathers – they don't notice – fall to the ground, the color of clouds, grey pearl, silver, summer rose and moody violet, turning metallic light iridescent, the color of sand, of wind and wing beats of pigeons lovemaking.

The soldiers move between blasts of loudspeakers, surrounded by electric currents of scorched desire that shock the heart back from the dead again and again. Hours drag on – a few small children holding their mother's hand, a lone shepherd, a minibus of UN staff register nationality and name, logging time – while overhead pigeons caress, common pigeons, scavengers that nest on window ledges of New York and Paris, the same haunted language, their cooing and echo, the same small eggs warmed to hatch where searchlights glare and burn and blind the moon's reflection in the empty craters of Erez.

(Written 10 April 2005, while waiting with a UNICEF team, for clearance to cross into Gaza.)