

Madrid, 5 January 1965

Dear sister Salma,

Your attack on me was a clever initiative that reminded me of that famous Levantine proverb, "He struck me and yet he himself cried; he got in front of me, and yet still complained..." It is a method of self-defense that I welcome with contentment and cheer; so that I may slightly resemble the Lord Messiah (peace be upon him) who took it upon himself to turn the other cheek...¹

I have never done wrong by you, for two reasons. The first is my devotion to and reverence for the art of letter-writing and the virtues of correspondence -- as well as my estimation of all who do not respond to letters as utterly devoid of humanity. The second is my love and admiration for you.

I responded to every correspondence I received from you, without exception. I remember getting a letter from you informing me that the picture of Carmen and La Giralda had arrived; I responded to it in a witty manner, and then sat around waiting to receive your own dear reply.

At this point, the interruption in communication began. I thought that you were busy with publishing your book in Beirut, or that your excitement for letter-writing had gone cold...and I deemed it wise to keep quiet, because I am in the habit of not writing to anyone who feels that correspondence with me is a heavy burden.

My misgivings and impressions only increased when I saw that your postcards were falling like rain over Madrid, and our friends who live there...without receiving for myself a single portion of your good wishes.

I was upset, of course; because I know that your strong sense of memory could not forget even the tiniest ant beneath the earth, and so it was not possible for you to have inadvertently forgotten a friend of my height and width (Maria Jesus is shorter than I am, and yet even she received a postcard...)

The point here (and there is no doubt that whatever mistake occurred was neither yours nor mine) is that one of our letters was most certainly lost in the mail; and due to our shared trait of oversensitivity, each of us holed up in their own fortress and refused to surrender...

¹ Apparently, Salma expressed frustration with Nizar in her last letter, perhaps accusing him of cutting off communication with her. Here, Qabbani defends himself while maintaining that the fault was not his.

I found it odd that a publisher would interfere in the matter of a book's title. If I were in your place, I would have wrung his neck and snatched the book away from him, since he clearly does not deserve the honor of printing it.

It is a strange situation, that these fools would go looking for money before they look to satisfy the demands of beauty. Additionally, why did the book move from the hands of Dar al-'Alm to Dar al-Hayat...since as I understood it, your initial negotiations had been with Dar al-'Alm. No matter how things turn out, and no matter what the ultimate title of the book is, I yearn intensely to read tales of sweet Carmen...and I hope that you will not leave her slumbering at the printing house for another year...

I encountered the pair of books written by beloved friend Zafir, and felt the utmost happiness when I saw that he had finally rolled up his sleeves and put on a pair of overalls, to take up the lot of a writer alongside us...for he has spent the last thirty years scared of wrinkling his freshly-ironed suit.

I wrote Zafir a very nice letter, including inside of it all my feelings towards him and his books.

Beloved Nadir's idea of traveling to teach at a university in Morocco should not inspire hesitation. Morocco, as I have heard, is a paradise among paradises, and spending two years in the Maghreb will serve as a chance to familiarize yourself with a piece of the Arab world whose beauty is still unknown to the rest of the planet.

May God bring Nadir success, and fill his path with happiness.

Finally, I am sending my best wishes and love to you, brother Nadir, my beloved Nada and Rasha, dear Nazih, and your esteemed parents, along with my felicitations for Eid al-Fitr; may God clothe you all in the trappings of peace, tranquility, and happiness until next year.

Nizar

