

Yafa Kfir - *Beyond the pain*

*Poems*

---

translated from the Hebrew by Daniel Morgenstern  
(English verse adapted by Bruce Barnett)



*To Tal,*

*My eldest daughter*

*My favourite of all*

*For being*

—

### **FRONT BOOK FLAP: Yafa Kfir**

Yafa Kfir is a tour guide, writer and photographer. She is adventure-loving and, as a woman on her own, goes on unpredictable journeys to distant places. She also travels with friends. She is driven by curiosity to embark on dream voyages, out of a longing to learn about the world. This does not diminish; it just grows bigger ...

She is also the mother of Captain Yael Kfir, who was 22 when she was killed in a terrorist attack at the Tzrifin junction on 9 September 2003.

*"Grief does not pass, it only increases. I have expressed the pain and suffering in words that are less than the pain and suffering themselves - modest words which express little. This is a collection of poems about Yael's absence, and my life without my youngest daughter."*

---

## **Personal journey**

The fire touched my soul

I survived her

I walk on the road

My pain is packed in my knapsack

Covered well

Wrapped up in many layers

So it does not touch the joy

Placed in the package below.

I carry them with me, the pain and the joy,

Going on my life's journey with my load

Walking back and forth

Going out and coming back

Opening a gate and shutting a door

Going through the temples

The palaces

Mountains

Valleys

Climbing up, going down

Seeing the world through all my senses

Hurting and happy

Knowing there is no exit

Both are always there for me

The joy, and with it, the pain

Both are always with me.

---

**LIVING WITH THE PAIN**

---

**The fragments of my dreams**

The end of all ways

the grave

awaits

me.

My daughter

in shrouds.

I dream dreams

that break on tombstones

and dive

into a black pit

shattered.

The fragments of my dreams

are swirling in a black pit.

---

**Instead**

I thought in my heart

that today, this afternoon,

instead of going to the cinema,  
I will go to the cemetery  
and thump my head on the tombstone,  
wound the skin on my forehead  
and smash my skull  
to die  
with her.  
—

### **Blue hat**

I bought  
a blue hat  
with a wide brim.  
In the shop windows  
a different woman is reflected.  
There is no weight in her journey.  
Pretty,  
tall  
and smiling.  
Fire does not catch her soul.  
—

**In a black sea of weeping**

In a black sea of weeping

I am

laughing

smiling

speaking

telling

dreaming

fulfilling

and more.

And at the same time

my soul is being destroyed

from sorrow

slowly

and so I'm

burning

disintegrating

into dust and ashes

without my dead daughter

without my daughter.

—

## **My pain**

The pain is all mine

and my dead daughter's.

She got the fire,

but I've got the wounds,

for ever

burning, bleeding.

Burning

slowly

until

life seeps out of me

and I go on

to the calmness

that comes after all.

—



**Flying to the sky**

Flying to the sky.

She is not here.

Faded away.

A blink of an eye

A short flick of a switch

by kings of evil.

A bomb exploded.

My child exploded

in light and fire

to smithereens

and flames,

everything

faded

away,

the good

the magic

the delight

the love.

—

**This is the longing for my dream**

This is the longing for my dream,

promised but non-existent

and impossible

to achieve,

a quest for clarity,

for the pure.

I get knocked about,

and smashed.

Dirty pavements

sweat

tears

wrinkles

spots on the face

spots that come

with old age.

Only death and terror

and fear,

nothing wrong with them.

—

## **Not for happiness**

Not for happiness

just for silence

will I wish.

It's the soul's desire.

A welcome silence

without pain

without the longing for

what will never happen.

It's the silence of life

my soul desires,

not the silence of death,

the shouts of children

in the background,

and babies' cries.

Men and women

busy on their own

near me.

am silent.

Alone.

—

**I have no words**

I

have no words

to express the pain

or to speak,

not even to think

of the pain.

I have no words to be angry.

I am thinking of my daughter

who was buried in this soil,

in fear, in terror,

and anxiety.

For me it is only

possible

to be

frozen

and hold within me

a lump of ice

between my diaphragm and ribs.

With my meagre strength

diminishing

I am

carrying

what is still alive in me.

—

### **The grief is in everything, Yael**

The grief is in everything, Yael,

in your absence,

in dreams at night where you appear

and say you'll come back here

and be my daughter again.

The grief is in everything,

in the forgetfulness in which I mourn

your memory,

your being.

Slowly

your memory diminishes

and nothing I can do will change that.

No more growth and renewal  
of the life that you were.

Only a bleeding wound remains,  
an amputated limb.

The grief is in everything,  
in my jealousy of mothers  
whose children all still live.

Just seeing a mother and daughter  
drives me crazy,  
because I too want you, my child,  
with me.

The grief is in the memory  
of the last moments,  
I was told of the fire,  
the thunder,  
how you fell with open eyes.  
I was not there to protect you.

In every contact with reality,  
the grief wells up,  
in the news broadcasts

from the latest war,  
in the reports from  
the occupied territories,  
in the history of the conflict,  
in the headlines of the newspapers.

From all directions it comes,  
cutting my flesh.

And the happiness is in everything,  
in the new-born goddess, El-i-Ya  
and her name spelt backwards from your own,  
Yael, Yaeli,  
and this highlights your absence, Yael,  
your absence, the feeling of  
your not being there  
at the moment,  
the very moment  
of her birth.

And in me there is joy, Yael,  
in your absence I am happy  
and I sometimes laugh,

I have remained in this life  
still with you,  
a woman maturing slowly  
towards old age,  
a woman happy with what is, Yael,  
dreaming dreams,  
experiencing the pain  
and especially missing  
telling you how it's been,  
where I went,  
what I experienced,  
what was good for me  
and how much joy there is,  
joy you'll never experience.

And so time passes and perishes,  
and with it sadness and happiness  
that you already do not know,  
already do not hear,  
and there is no avoiding



being here without you.

—

### **Still not**

Still I have not mourned my daughter

I have not worn sackcloth and ashes

I have not cried

Have not wailed

Have not shouted.

With my hands,

I pulled myself

to the light

to enjoy beauty,

to feel pleased

by the luck

of those whose home

the grief has skipped.

But with my nails,

I am digging into the flesh

of my cheek, my forehead,

I'm pulling out my own life

from within,

the grief  
the blood,  
into the light  
into life,  
as if nothing happened  
within a second of screws and nails  
and explosives,  
and life goes on and continues  
as if nothing happened.

—

**Parallel Lines**  
**(Sixth anniversary of Yael's death)**

Life  
is gushing like a sea  
bustling and rushing and multi-faceted  
shapes  
colours  
transparency and opacity  
and the abyss  
and a wave carried high  
and a fresh splash

with them

the pain

the yearning of the heart

moving in a parallel line

up

down

clutching my neck

pulling me to the abyss

to die with her.

—

## **Soon**

I always laugh,

I always cry.

With me always,

my living daughter

and my dead daughter,

slowly like this,

around the edges,

the clarity of my mind

is getting lost.  
Soon

like the village crazy woman,

I will bury my head

in the hot blaze of the bonfire,

I will yell to the sky,

scream at the land,

at the sound of children's laughter

on a summer's night

in the gardens.

—

## **SECOND GENERATION POEMS**

—

### **Second Generation**

My parents passed away

still silent.

They took with them

the history

the sufferings

the terrors of the war

and the death camps.

Even how they were called

I do not know,

my aunts

and my uncles,

my family

that I did not get to know

to feel, to touch

to love

in their lives

which ended too soon

in Poland and Russia.

My daughter

was blown up

in the fire,

perished in a moment,

at the speed of explosives.

She was...

is no more,

ending

all her dreams,  
hopes.

She'll never know  
any more joy  
sorrow  
smiles  
pain  
life.

Such have I remained  
water without a shore,  
floating like an ocean,  
never-ending  
empty lonely spaces,  
a past and a future  
I have not.

My life is cut off,  
I do not know  
where I am going.

—

### **My mother carried all the anxieties**

My mother carried with her  
all the anxieties  
and passed them onto me,  
in spite of her love  
my mother bequeathed to me  
also her fear  
always expecting  
the worst of all.

The death that overtook me  
is the fulfilment of the fears  
which my mother carried with her,  
the death, the desertion  
and the loneliness

Death overtook me,  
demolished the most precious in my life,  
my daughter.

I wanted not to know,

to live as if all  
is alright,  
to go on with life,  
to marry,  
to give birth  
and to hope that the terror  
remained in Europe  
consumed in fire,  
ended in the flames,  
faded in the smoke,  
ended with my aunts,  
my uncle,  
my grandfather  
and my grandmothers,  
who perished  
and were gathered to the sky.  
Of course, they were fearful,  
I know they were afraid of death.  
Their fear, their anxiety  
seeped out of the crematoria



into their souls.

Their fear lingers on

and touches my life.

I wanted not to know

and also today,

with my daughter buried in the ground,

I choose to deny the terror,

to live here

as if all is alright.

I get carried away

by the beauty of the world,

I concentrate

on collecting pearls,

looking for gems,

quiet, good people

along the way,

and all the time I know:

There is only an abundance of good

if also there is bad –

always was, is and  
ever will be  
horrible, vile,  
dreadful, and  
only round the next corner.  
It's there expecting me to come,  
it's waiting for me,  
it is only a matter of time  
before the fear  
once again materialises  
into something horrible,  
vile, dreadful  
and real,  
with no way out, no peace,  
and once again  
I will experience them -  
the death, abandonment  
and loneliness.

—

**Between the land of the bear and the land of the jackal**

My mother was born at a time  
which stunted her youth,  
stole my grandmother, my grandfather,  
my uncle and my aunt.

My mother was saved by the skin of her teeth,  
an escaping orphan  
rolling between the camps  
across an enlightened continent,  
denied to her, a child refugee,  
whose world had collapsed.

In Israel  
she forgot,  
she forced herself  
to forget everything.  
In her meagre strength  
she delivered me  
into the world,  
and my brother,

as if nothing had happened.

She never spoke.

And when I, on my journeys,  
travelling along the road,  
went back to the bear countries  
in different times,  
under different regimes,  
to the places where  
my broken-hearted mother  
had never returned,  
to the villages of sorrow,  
to the loss of her family,  
my mother rejoiced in my journeys  
into her past  
back to her roots,  
which were torn away  
from her loved ones who perished.  
Here she re-spun  
the unravelled threads,

and the fragments of memories  
turned into a new fabric  
of life.

(The name of this poem is borrowed from the poetry of Alexander Penn about the Russian bear and the Middle Eastern jackal, and the new immigrant who is torn between them. My mother was born in Minsk, Belaruss, and escaped from there when the Second World War broke out, with her younger sister. Her family was sent to the extermination camps by the Germans.)

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## END OF THE WAY POEMS

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### **Suicidal thoughts**

Death hovers over my head

transparent yet there

bigger than me

haunting my dreams,

his crushing hands

strangling me,

and the smile

and the need to hope

that something good

will come to me

from the next day.

He holds me and

does not let go.

He doesn't know

he has no hold

over me,

I am beyond  
his control.

He holds me and  
does not let me go.

I'm tangled in the edges  
of his garment and I laugh.

I am slipping away,  
leaving behind his outstretched hand,  
that reaches out to me.

Not yet,  
I say to him,  
not yet.

—

### **Wanting a sky burial**

I am a stranger in Jerusalem.

My young daughter is buried  
in a city I once lived in.

My parents rest on Mount Carmel.

I live on a mountain

opposite the desert.  
When I die,  
  
by the rules of my religion  
  
I will be assigned  
  
a small plot, a square  
  
surrounded by strangers.  
  
My corpse will be thrown there,  
  
anonymous, unknown,  
  
like my life here  
  
between the Jerusalem stones,  
  
between the thorns,  
  
the dust  
  
and the light blue sky,  
  
a stranger  
  
remote from life.  
  
I would like a sky burial,  
  
like high up there,  
  
a place where people know  
  
there is nothing  
  
after everything ends,



and for this emptiness  
my heart yearns

to give up my flesh

to the birds in the sky.

I would like to be dispersed

in the air

as if I no longer ached,

I

Was'nt

here.

(In Tibet, the earth is rocky, hard and sometimes frozen. That's why the dead are not buried, and the bodies are taken apart and given to the birds to be eaten.)

—

### **In the morning I walk in the vineyards**

In the morning I walk in the vineyards.

There

on top of a hill,

among the cypresses,

there is a cemetery.

The ground is soft up there  
and recycles the body  
back to the sky  
and to the clouds, and the water,  
and back to the sky.

I no longer want a sky burial,  
I want to return to the ground  
at the end of my days.

I want to go back to life,  
to the flowers,  
to the roots, stems and leaves,  
to return to the world,  
to being within it  
a part of the infinite,  
like all people.

(Several years ago, I moved to Kfar Tavor,  
where I am not a stranger.)

—

**SONGS OF TOMORROW**

---

**My Heart is being pulled toward the abyss**

My heart is being pulled toward the abyss

to the eternal silence

where suffering is no more

but

on the ground

the sun is shining on me

every morning anew

and promises

expectations

and possibly

after all

yes

possibly there is worth

to life on this earth.

---

**Beauty disintegrates with the end of spring**

Beauty disintegrates

with the end of spring

and the heat of the summer

brings life to an end.

It is time for death here.

And expectation

and the belief

that all will bloom again.

And me as well,

I will still be here

to watch the magic.

—

### **From the sky to the sea**

From the sky to the sea,

to the earth,

the moon and stars above,

I dive into the clouds,

the blanket of clouds,

soft white fluff,

like the stuff

of dreams

and it tears apart,

the black,  
Mediterranean Sea,  
our sea  
is dark.

My country,  
the land of my new lost dreams,  
the place of my child's grave,  
what has been  
and what will be,  
are all just  
fragments of scenery  
between the clouds.

I have just a moment  
to choose to land  
or to take off up  
into the sky.

---

**As best as I can**

*To Amiram*

She is in my heart,

and she is gone,

the pain

still very much there

comes and goes.

The sight of a boy awakens it,

a girl in a mirror,

the tenderness between

a mother and her daughter,

young ladies out with their mums,

going past me in the street,

for them the closeness,

for me the tears.

I am soaked in grief

like a great big

invisible scarf

wrapped round me

strangling me  
forcing me to gasp for breath  
and to know  
not everything is promised,  
there is an end to joy.

I want to die with her  
and also to live,  
to live with her sister,  
my other daughter,  
with my granddaughters,  
and grandsons,\*  
this is my family,  
to live with my beloved,  
my man.

He is always there,  
like an anchor,  
like a beacon,  
a flag waving above,  
he is calling me to come  
and we will live,



and won't die.

We will live the best we can,

inspite of the pain

and the longing.

Death and grief are always here

right beside me,

they're present in my dreams.

I want to live

together with the grief

as best as I can.

(Amiram Simon, loved by many people, my man, my husband,  
my best friend, left this life in the winter of 2013.)

\*(this line has been added as Yafa now has 2 grandsons and 3  
granddaughters.)

—

**I will never be old**

I will never be old.

From here I will go back

to being a child,

I will wear red, purple,

stripes, ribbons and buttons.

I will be like a flower,

or a butterfly,

rich in colours and scents.\*

I will drown the sorrow

till it ends.

I will migrate,

I will move, move, move,

I will sing with the gypsies

along the way.

I will take off with the birds

beyond the pain,

high up and unattached,

I will blend with the blue sky,

I will dive into the sun

like a dragonfly

with translucent wings,

into the bosom of the angels,

I will return to sanity, ...light\*\*

in the bosom of the angels.

(\*Note how the English version seems to draw a contrast between being rich in 'colours and scents' when escaping into a child-like alternative existence, as opposed to (having to worry about such things as) being rich in 'dollars and cents' when living in the 'reality' of the adult world.)

(\*\*Note the use of the word 'light' in the English implies a double meaning, whereas the Hebrew word only means light in terms of weight. I think both senses of light are appropriate.)

—

### **Maybe in the autumn**

A different journey

is now taking over

my time.

I dream of days

without fear and death,

knowing that maybe

they will not

come to be.

Lately, I sense this feeling

from all directions,

I know this is the time  
to make room  
for all my dreams.

Maybe in the autumn,  
I will set out  
on all these journeys.

(Note: 'they' in “ maybe / they will not / come to be “ seems to refer to ' death and fear ', but may possibly refer to 'the days without them'.)

---

**JOURNEY SONGS**

---

**Jeans and two T shirts\***

Jeans and two T shirts -

I am travelling,

don't know

how long

or what will be,

or where, or when.

Travelling to freedom,

to a far away place,

I'm deserting certainty,

travelling light

without any weight,

pain or sorrow

in my backpack,

only dreams.

---

## **I chose a journey**

I know this is just a dream,  
the journeys, the trains, the planes  
and living  
beyond the boundaries of reality,  
without changing anything.

I know the journey's just a dream  
but for me it is routine.

I chose the dream.

I don't want to live  
in reality.

Too complicated  
for me,  
too harsh and painful,  
and annoying,  
it batters me  
with endless blows  
up to the very limit

of my strength.

I chose the dream,

I chose to be immersed in beauty,

to collect pearls,

to see new sights

and have chance meetings,

all so rich

in flavour

and quickly past

and making way

for what comes next.

This is just a dream,

so what?

I, myself,

chose the dream.

—

**I know these are luxuries**

I know

these are luxuries

all mine,

my time,

the money I kept for the trip – mine,  
the pleasure of wandering – mine,  
being free  
and enjoying,  
with open eyes,  
so many temptations,  
and sights,  
such sweetness and grace  
and beauty.

Going further,  
further still.

It's all mine,  
the time,  
the pleasure,  
the city of many wonders,  
the little village,  
the glory of nature,  
the great wide world.



All Mine.

—

### **Lonely on the road**

The lives of foreigners

cross my path

and don't touch me,

circles of life

kissing my journey

in scent

sound

colour and shape,

moving on their own,

passing me

as if I wasn't there.

—

### **In China**

In China

in a bubble

transparent

touching

not touching

the smells

the pain

the beauty

the horror

the reality

of the peasant

the vagrant

the barefoot

the merchant of beasts

the trader of women

a prostitute

a begger

a wealthy man

and girls touching me

in my foreignness

sensing a distant fragrance

thinking

who is this woman

that looks at everything

so silently?

And the receptionist:

He smiles at me

in the morning

expecting a tip

smiles, thanks me

and bows.

Love bought in a moment.

—

**On the roads i am a gypsy with a rose**

On the roads

I am a gypsy with a rose,

that's how I love to be,

there's nothing like it.

Living myself in each moment,

without thoughts of what isn't

and won't be, for me.

There is nothing directing me

along pre-set pathways,

like a missile aimed at its target,

towards a collision.

On the roads  
I am a gypsy with a rose,  
woman of the world,  
the one and only me.

On the roads  
I am free as a butterfly,  
tasting and experiencing,  
drawing in just good  
to my bosom,  
I'm for ever  
changing the images  
and open spaces  
that surround me  
and I do not sink.

The air is clear  
of painful knocks  
and worries  
of what will be  
in the long-term.

Here everything  
is the way I want it.

On the roads

the view is never the same

and I do not sit for long.

I walk along the roads

light, just breathing,

free, unchained,

no obligations.

Walking on the roads,

my body moves with ease

weightlessly.

I move confidently

as I cross more and more

space and time,

falling in love with

each passing beauty

that crosses my path

and does not return.

Nature and the city

both please me.

Far away from competition,  
from possessions,  
and from all demands,  
I have no expectations,  
only the sensation  
of levitation  
and no connection  
to any weight  
that might pull my feet  
to the abyss.

---

**A NEW WAY**

---

**A new way**

My life is drenched with pain,  
but I want to be soaked  
in love, and tranquility,  
en route to another place,  
parting from the dreams  
which were broken.

Rewriting the pages  
of my life story  
from the beginning,  
in a different script,  
in a language  
unfamiliar to me,  
of love,  
for myself.

---

**Back book flap:****A way out**

Beyond my every day,

beyond the loss,

the memories

and the shattered hopes,

there is

a different

reality.

I

travel

by train to Paris

remembering

there is a way out,

you can always

do things

differently.

There is

another



way.

—

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**A NEW WAY**

**A new way**

**BACK BOOK FLAP: A way out**

