

A Love Letter to Egypt

(For the 50th Jubilee of the Cairo International Book Fair and Festival)

My childhood was a place of many silences, punctuated
by the ticking of the old French clock
and my grandmother's snores.

In winter the London fog came down
as I sat at the window, travelling the world
a page at a time,
tracing with my finger
the rivers and mountains of my favourite places –

Africa, Australia and Egypt – O Egypt!

Here was the land of Pharaohs and palm trees,
of the golden-faced boy-king and his mother, Nefertiti; of blazing
deserts and lush green valleys, of the blind,
inscrutable Sphinx and the Nile of a thousand graces.

How I loved Moses, asleep in his basket, as dragonflies flashed
like jewels about the rushes – a child, like me
adrift on the waters.

And the pyramids at Giza where my father once posed for a photo,
taking time out from war in his lieutenant's uniform –
he was smiling, smiling into the Egyptian sun
as I waited among the stars to be born.

Jenny Lewis
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Translated into Arabic by Ruba Abughaida