

# A Translation into English of Khalil I. Al-Fuzai's<sup>1</sup> "Reaching the End"<sup>2</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

A youth cannot marry his cousin because her father refuses for economic reasons. This story shows how the Saudi Arabian society connects marriage with wealth, even when it comes to relatives who are obligated culturally to take care of one another. A father is ready to sacrifice his daughter for a rich person, hoping that marriage bargain will improve his economic status. The customs of the society validate that a father can do to his daughter what he sees as good. Also, the norms of the society require a younger relative to obey an older one, even working for him; a person cannot fight back or challenge an elder. Accordingly, the relation between relatives is a relation of traditional and cultural power recognized and imposed by the society.

In this story, the protagonist is colonized physically and mentally: in addition to having been exploited for fifteen years, he believes that his life is secured with his uncle. And hence, "he almost lost his personal independence," as the story states. He can lose anything as long as his future is granted, for he believes that he is the only heir of his uncle. But after his uncle's refusal of his proposal, he becomes aware of being marginalized and colonized. He has to struggle and search for his identity after being considered as "a nobody in the world of the living." Like the protagonist who kills his father in the previous story, the youth of this story "deludes himself that he is brave and that he has to prove it."

Yet as an oppressed and marginalized person, the main character is neither supposed nor expected to practice oppression. But he thinks of violating his uncle's daughter's honor—for no fault except that she is his uncle's daughter. In a culture that valorizes masculine values, the wretched girl becomes the victim of both her father, who wants to sell her as a commodity for the one who pays more, and of her cousin, who wants to exploit her in order to achieve his goals. Finally, in my translation, some well-known words are kept with their original pronunciation and written in italics to keep the reader aware of the Arabic text.<sup>3</sup>

**Keywords:** Khalil al-Fuzai, Saudi, short story, 'Reaching the End'

## TRANSLATION

He starts walking in the quiet of night and its frightful silence, and everything is still, with the exception of the intermittent barking of dogs and the croaking of frogs coming from the big marshes that stretch endlessly outside the village . . .<sup>4</sup> the alleys are, as usual, full of dirt and stagnant water. How the water does bother him! He hates it as he hates his

uncle. And the stagnancy of the water reminds him of his uncle's false goodness, which hides behind it proof of his uncle's lowliness, exactly like these marshes which need someone to stir up their stagnancy in order to reveal the odorous smell, and that reflects their reality as his uncle's reality was revealed when he unintentionally provoked him . . . he suddenly stops, imagining that he has heard a voice. Then, after he tightens his *igaa!*<sup>5</sup> he continues walking and throws the two ends of his torn *ghutra*<sup>6</sup> to hang over his back, which allows him to scratch his neck that is planted vigorously above his thin body. He deludes himself that he is brave and that he has to prove so.

He has tried to convince himself of the benefits of what he intends to do. In the end, he finds no way other than this to get rid of the vortex of worry that he lives in since his uncle has clearly told him his position. He does not forget the day he went to his uncle to broach the subject that disturbs him so much. And his status was pitiable. The sweat pours forth from his body while his teeth bite the nails of his hands, which he takes out of his mouth to scratch the bushy hairs of his chest. And he says, "I hope you will be generous with me. Oh uncle . . . I want to . . ."

But his uncle impatiently interrupts him, "What do you want? Your demands are endless."

Though he does not remember requesting anything from his uncle, he pretends that he remembers in order to say, after he has called up his strength and become victorious over the hidden struggle of his self, "I want you to let me marry your daughter."

He feels comfortable, yet he realizes the danger of the bomb he has exploded when he sees the signs of anger appearing on his uncle's face! Even his temples . . . and then his uncle shouts, "Are you crazy?"

He pretends he is a fool, and after he draws on the angles of his lips a smile intended to soften the situation, he asks, "Why?"

Ignoring the question, his uncle continues, "You must be crazy . . . my daughter was not created for the likes of you . . . you have to get this idea out of your damned mind."

At that moment, he does not dare to continue speaking. So he withdraws with bitter disappointment, and leaves his uncle saying things he does not remember anymore. He already knows that his uncle's response will not be easier this time, but he indulges in hopes and wishes, believing he is the best to marry his uncle's daughter. They grew up together, live together and are dreaming of a marital life full of happiness . . . or at least he believes in something like that, even after his father and mother died, and left him under the mercy of his uncle who in turn used him for fifteen years as a worker in his wide fields, without pay. But for what he does need wages as long as his life is secured and he will marry his uncle's daughter, and he will be heir to his uncle's possessions after the latter's death—he thinks like this . . . only now he feels how frivolous it is. His uncle has exploited him and made use of him any way he wants; he never dares to oppose his uncle in anything he is told. He always used to comply with his uncle's requests without any attempt to protest or a wish to resist, until he almost lost his personal independence. But now he will prove to everyone that he is worthy of other people's attention . . . he will force them to pay attention to his cause, particularly his uncle; he will prove that he is not a nobody in the world of the living. The light of a lantern carried by someone beams on his face, and then he finds himself adding a meaningless smile to the picture of his face, during which his yellow teeth come into view while the muscles of his face are contracted,

and the wrinkles of his forehead become visible as if they were conveying the hardships of life. Without changing his frowning features, he says after passing the carrier of the lantern, "*Asslamu aleikum.*"<sup>7</sup>

He is not ready to hear the expected response: "*Waleikummu asslam.*"<sup>8</sup> The other's words dissolve in the darkness before he allows them to reach his ears and he walks alone . . . hatred accompanies him . . . he steps on a small tin can. He feels it crush under his heartless foot. Then, he wishes he could crush his uncle as he has crushed that small can. He tries to ignore the hooting of an owl coming from the space within view of an old house, but pessimism controls him.

Can you see? . . . is he going to succeed in his mission? And what will happen? Is his uncle going to agree and let him marry his daughter after that? It is a disgusting act, but what is the alternative? There is no other way.

His act is violating his uncle's daughter's honor.

He does not relish the idea of violating her honor. Hence, he persuades himself to consider his act as a request of right. In spite of the fact that he is not convinced of such a justification in the depths of his mind, he finds it a stimulus to carry out his mission without hesitation, but is it the wretched daughter's fault? She becomes no more than a victim of her father who wants her to reap the consequences of his will. He himself did nothing to cause his torture. Perhaps she joins her father in his opinion as well.

Who knows . . .

For a long time he has been unable to see her except by accident when she does not see him. She is usually reading a book and moves her lips while reading it and lets one of her fingers point to the letters. She does all this while standing and walking back and forth.

Let this be the end of his torment, and the beginning of a marital life which may not be happy at first beginning, but he is ready to do his utmost to ensure happiness for it . . . his uncle will not withhold his approval of the marriage when he learns about the incident . . . his uncle's daughter will find him a complete embodiment of lowliness and meanness, but she will accept him as a husband in order to avoid a scandal . . . this does not matter, and everything does not matter, except for one thing, which is to end his mission peacefully according to the plot he has hatched in his mind.

At last, he arrives at his uncle's house and climbs the fence. His heart's pulse increases in commotion as he proceeds towards his aim; there is no justification for fear now, because he comes facing reality . . . there is no escape but to carry out the plan.

Does he retreat?

It is late; he has but to stay with his course of action until he ultimately reaches the final stage of his plan . . . he can return now just as he has come and no one will see him, but he does not want to turn back . . . was he not determined to prove his qualifications through attracting the attention of others? . . . and reaching out to his uncle's daughter? Is it logic that pushes him to dismiss the idea of retreat? There is no need to fear, all are asleep at this time. No one can hear him. Silence spreads over everything. How hard these moments are! Oh, if time would only stop and not resume its course until after carrying out his mission . . . hard moments--if only they could be subtracted from his life. What will they say about him tomorrow in the gatherings at the village if his matter is disclosed,

but this will not happen . . . no one will know about this incident except his uncle, and he himself will tell him if he needs to.

Then . . . he starts climbing the stairs of the ladder leading to the rooftop where he thinks his uncle's daughter sleeps . . . the beating of his heart increases in commotion as he proceeds one step toward his aim. He stumbles over the edge of his *thobe*<sup>9</sup>. So he stays in place for awhile to ensure that no one is awakening. When he rises trying to climb, the edge of his *thobe* is still under his feet. Hence, he slips again. Finally, he gets rid of the hindrance and starts climbing . . . his pulse races more and more. And when he raises his foot from the last stair of the ladder, there is [the one] who is waiting for him . . . it is his uncle standing like a horrible ghost in the deep-black darkness. He is stunned, and he feels nothing except when a strong slap hits his temple so that he almost loses his balance. And without saying a word, he runs away while his uncle's curses follow him in the darkness of the night.

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### TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- 1) KHALIL I. AL-FUZAI (1940) is a literary writer from Saudi Arabia. In his writings, he introduced his culture, addressing many social, cultural, and religious issues he saw in his society.
- 2) This story was translated from the following Arabic source: Al-Fuzai, Khalil I. Thursday Fair. (سوق الخميس). Taif: Taif Literary Club, 1979: 17-22.
- 3) An introduction a reader may need to connect the text to its context.
- 4) . . . Every now and then there are few dots found in the source text.
- 5) *igal*: a cord worn on the headdress.
- 6) *ghutra*: an Arabian headdress worn by men.
- 7) *Asslamu aleikum*: Peace be upon you.
- 8) *Waleikumu asslam*: Peace be upon you, too.
- 9) *thobe*: a gown worn by men.

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