

Martyr

In memory of Marwa El-Sherbini, d. 1 July 2009 in Dresden, Germany

It all began on the playground.
Her three-year-old son tugged at her skirts.
A grown man sat on the swing.
Please allow my son to use the swing, she said.
“Go back where you came from,” he shouted.
“Terrorist. Whore. You’ve no right to be here.”

She’d been a handball champion
in Alexandria, earned a degree in Pharmacy,
married a Geneticist, who came to Dresden
to work in the Max Planck Institute.
How dare he speak to her like that in front of her son?
To him she was just a woman in a headscarf. Noxious Muslim.
She called the police. He was arrested and fined.
It should have ended then and there.

But he fought the fine,
compelled her to meet him in the courtroom.
Three months pregnant, she came with husband and son,
all she had. In front of the judge
he shouted: “You have no right to live,”
pulled out a knife, stabbed her eighteen times.
Everyone stood still. Only her husband rushed to her side,
shared the stab wounds, was shot mistakenly by police.

In Egypt where thousands came to her funeral
they call her the headscarf martyr,
but her son still calls her mama
when he looks behind the picture of the smiling woman,
her dark eyes shining with love,
for the one who asked if he could have
a turn on the playground swing.



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