



# A Lesson in the Nature of Resistance

*A vegetative state is immediately understood as a state of inaction despite being alive and awake. What if a plant can actually stir an action in us while being politically in a vegetative state, feeling defeated in spirit?*

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My parents' house is surrounded by a large garden, which they have attended to over the years with diligent devotion, cultivating many different plants and fruit trees that grew slowly but insistently until the day finally came when we were showered with their crop; figs, grapes, pomegranates, apricots, pears, loquats, dates, berries, almonds, and all types of citrus. There were also vegetables; lettuce, tomatoes, parsley, okra, potatoes, aubergine, peppers, onions, and garlic. In short, our house is surrounded by a garden that made the idea of buying fruit and vegetables from the market seem very strange.

But at the north-western edge of this garden, where the soil was rockier and less fertile, there grew a small caper bush. Aside from its thorns, it had flowers that blossomed in late spring, adorning the whole plant with delicate white petals that lasted right through to the start of autumn. It also had round leaves that were similarly unruffled by the changing seasons; whether it was autumn or spring, even an Arab spring, they always stayed light green. This plant produced, year round, little fruits that looked like earrings. During our childhood games we would pick them, mindful of the thorns, and drape them around our ears so they dangled like our mothers' earrings did. Apart from that, we did not know what to do with the plant, and barely noticed it, not even its fragile white flowers. It was always there, the last bit of the garden we passed on our way to school early in the morning, and the first thing to welcome us back on our return. Sometimes, despite its spiky thorns and drab green leaves, the sight of it brought on a feeling of warmth and serenity. It was also a reminder of the truth of that piece of land, the nature of its soil and the plants that used to grow on it before my parents eliminated them all as part of their plan for a paradise. That plant annoyed them a lot. Whenever they plucked it out it grew back. After a while they simply left it alone to grow as it pleased. And it did so with no impediments, especially as it



was saved by its thorns from the devilish hands of us children, which showed the other plants and trees less mercy. Every few minutes my parents had to warn us not to step on the parsley bed or the aubergine shoots, and not to climb the apricot or loquat trees and break their fragile young branches.



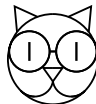
Then finally the ultimate blow was dealt; or so it seemed to us all, and certainly to my parents. They decided to build a small storage room on the spot where the plant grew. We did not really need a storage room, but they said that at least that way they could put the space to good use, instead of it being occupied by the caper plant, which they considered useless. So they woke up one morning and started digging. They dug a hole about a meter deep and four meters wide, and pulled out the plant and its roots. Then they filled the hole with rocks, and covered it with cement. After they had finished building the storage room, they tiled the floor. Unlike the caper plant, this building, made of bare black blocks of volcanic stone, did not stir up any particular feelings of warmth and serenity. Rather, it evoked highhandedness, especially the highhandedness of my parents. It looked as if they had finally succeeded in banishing the last traces of real nature, as manifested in the thorny plants, from around their house.



It was more than three and a half decades ago when my parents erected that storage room. Last summer, while visiting them, a feeling of nostalgia propelled me to check on that back part of the garden and the secret gate I used to pass through on my way to school and back, in my childhood. This was something I hadn't done since I finished school and left home. As I was walking around, suddenly, at the very top of the storage room's wall, between the bare black lava stones, I caught sight of something pale green. I drew nearer to the storage room. It was nothing but the caper plant, sprouting anew, this time from between the cracks in the wall.

## BIO

Adania Shibli (\*Palestine, 1974) has written novels, plays, short stories and narrative essays. She has twice been awarded the Qattan Young Writer's Award—Palestine: in 2001 for the novel *Masaas* (2002; translated as *Touch*, 2009), and in 2003 for the novel *Kulluna Ba'id bethat al Miqdar aan el-Hub* (2004; translated as *We Are All Equally Far from Love*, 2012). Her latest is the novel *Tafsil Thanawi* (2017, translated as *Minor Detail*, 2020), which was shortlisted for the National Book Award and nominated for the International Booker Prize. Shibli is also engaged in academic research and teaching at different universities across Europe, as well as at Birzeit University, Palestine (2012–2018). Shibli has been acting in the past couple of years as a co-convenor for the 5th edition of the Bergen Assembly.



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