

Text A: The talk of the trees that stand in the village street

[Adapted from James Andrews]

How still it is! Nobody in the village street, the children all at school and the chickens murmuring lazily in the sunshine. Only a south wind blows lightly through the trees tossing the slight branches of the date palm against the sky like feathers, stirring the sand and dust into gentle eddies. Warm air basks against the walls of the mosque.

Through the silence there is a little whisper like a low song. It is the song of the trees. Each has its own voice known from all others by the ear that has learned how to listen.



The topmost branches of the palm are talking of the sky. The highest white clouds that float in the far blue talk of the sunrise gold and the rose-color of sunset that always rest upon them most lovingly. But down deep in the heart of the great branches you may hear something quite different and not less sweet.

“Look into my heart,” sings the palm-tree, “and you will see the new dates springing secretly from their winter hiding place. They are young and excited with a summer ripening ahead of them.”

The fanning wind wafts across the road the voice of the old ghaf who has seen generations come and go. The other trees can’t always understand him: he is the gnarled grandfather among them. A grandfather is always suspected of knowing a little more than anyone else.

“Once there was no road here,” he sings, his voice faint but firm. “Just a track. I loved to watch the houbara run, trying to hide from the falcon that swooped through the azure sky like the swift blade of a ceremonial sword. Caravans of camels would pass by with their herders. I used to dream about where they had come from and where they were going to.

“Those were the days before the trucks came through. Then people came with axes and saws and many of my comrades fell before their onslaught. Only later did they see that this was not the way. Their great leader showed them that they needed the trees. Because people are always moving, always hurrying, they do not see, they do not listen. They should learn from the trees. We keep still. We keep silent. Nothing escapes us.”

Another voice across the street, lighter and sweeter is the acacia. Hers is a song of life and hope. “See the sparrows and the bulbuls flitting among my thorns,” she sings. “I love to watch them chase each other always seeking, always in pursuit. Nobody knows what they are seeking. They are just bursting with the energy of life. The goats take shelter in the shade beneath my branches. They play hide and seek with the heat of the sun as it tracks overhead on the wheel of time.

“How blue the sky is! See how the swifts cut through it on their dagger-like wings. They carve swirling patterns only a tree’s eye can see.”

How much the trees have to say! Of the past and of the future. Sometime I may try to tell you something more of what they say. For now here ends the talk of the trees that stood in the village street.

Text B: Time

[By My Ngan Duong]



A young boy
Secure in his childhood
Whose laughter greets the morning
And echoes through the day.
Time to him
Is a friendly creature
And patient teacher.

A middle aged man
Secure in his job
Has no time for laughter.
Skip lunch
Too much work to do.
Time to him
Is a hard boss
Too precious to be lost.

An old man
Secure in his pension
Has all day and night
To idle away.
Time to him
Is a heavy burden
On his brow like a turban.

Text C: Date Festival Aims for New Heights

[Adapted from The National Newspaper, UAE]

As the Liwa date festival drew to a close organisers were celebrating breaking all kinds of records. It is promising that next year's event will be "the biggest in the world."

"The festival has been bigger and better than ever expected," said Ahmed al Dhaheri, a member of the festival committee. "We are pleased with the results of all our planning. On the first day alone we saw 10,000 visitors and over the 17 days we have welcomed 180,000 through the gates, the highest number we have ever had."



More than 10,000 farmers entered date competitions compared to the 3,000 who entered last year and next year. The event hopes to double that number again by opening the contests to the whole of the Emirates instead of just the Western Region.

Mr Dhaheri believes that visitors will understand more about the date industry if they attend the event. "Everyone will know what Liwa is all about. Most people have never heard of us but after this festival they will come to visit us from across the world."

Last night prize winners took away nearly Dh4 million in prizes. About 7,000 plates of fruit were entered in the contests to find the best producers.

Awards were also being handed out for the best model date farms. Judges used a set of criteria to select the winners. Up to 60 baskets of dates were sold in daily auctions. Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Khalid snapped up all 52 baskets sold on Friday for Dh160,000.

Mr.Dhaheri said "The huge success of the festival has inspired us. We are thinking of ways we might be able to enter the Guinness Book of World Records next year. We cannot reveal too much as we do not want to put all our dates in one basket. Date palm trees were the main source of food for our ancestors", he added.

The Liwa date festival began four years ago as a simple one day event to promote the produce of the region. Now it includes poetry nights, lectures on agriculture, the date palm industry, and a children's marquee.

"I am already starting to worry about next year as the challenge is to go even bigger and better," said Ahmed al Dhaheri.

Text D:



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