

Mohannad al-Azawi was his name,
a Sunni, just twenty-seven.
Pigeons were his trade, canaries too—
but nightingales his passion.

And in his shop on afternoons,
he would often tell the tale
of the wonderful Oiseau
that warbled in its gilded cage,

while the Emir of the East
bowed low, oh so slow,
in his scarlet pantaloons,
crooned "Araaaaabaha, baazoom!"

And the Wazir of the West
danced to the chant, in his very pointed shoes,
played duet on his oud,
cried "Wallazoon, Aa'aroon!"

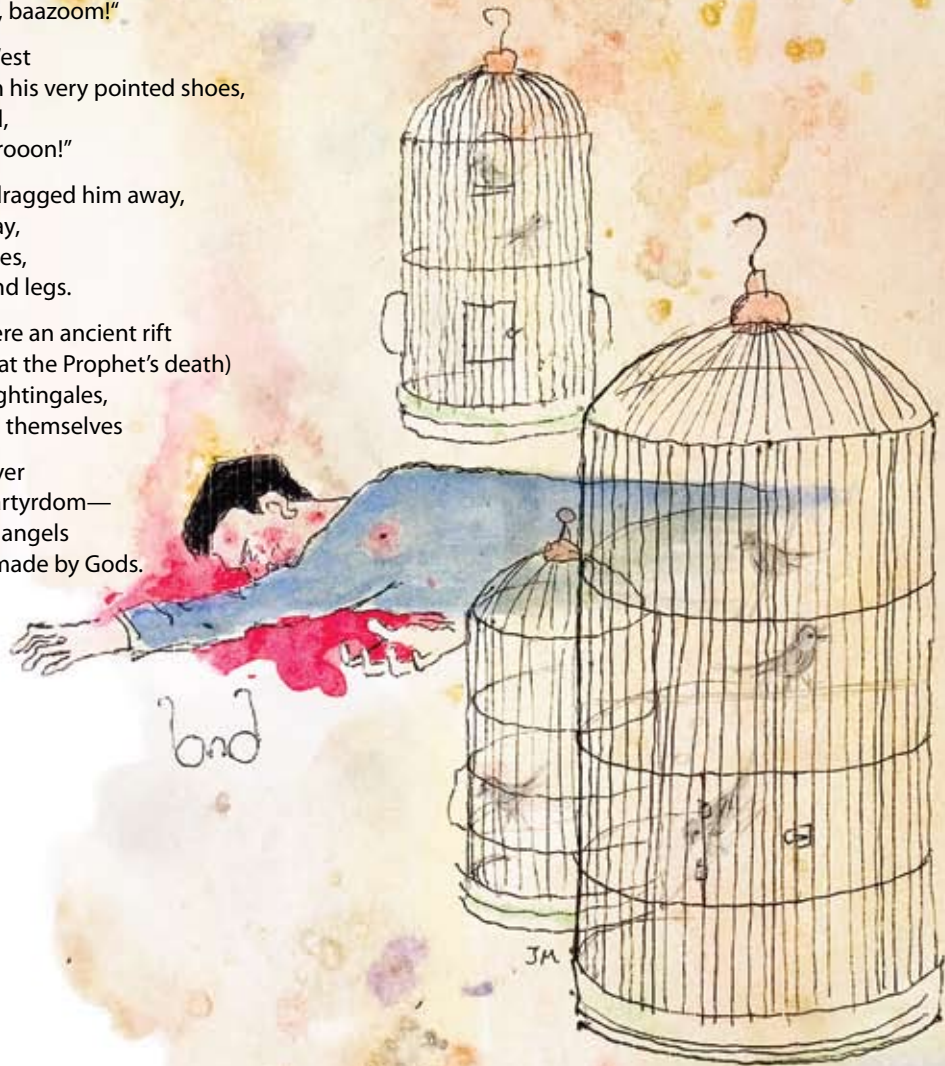
Men dressed in black dragged him away,
his body found next day,
his skin, a map of bruises,
drill holes in his face and legs.

He died in a world where an ancient rift
(who would be Caliph at the Prophet's death)
can touch a lover of nightingales,
where flagellants whip themselves

bloody in frenzied prayer
to commemorate a martyrdom—
a land of visitations by angels
and broken promises made by Gods.

The Man Who Raised Nightingales

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