

IT WASN'T THE WORST THING

J.B. Drori

I squinted at the spires of sky-high forests of
cement-buildings piercing clouds, blocking the sun,
its beams searching for its ancient trees
in streets, avenues, yards, parks.

Thousands of life-less eyes, quadrangular glass windows,
peer down on a throng of harried street-walkers bearing down.
I was propelled forward against a sullen red-eyed hulk and
tightened my grip on my teen sister's hand, hanging on.

That wasn't the worst thing.

Countless automobiles, horns blaring, tires screeching,
careen up and down congested streets,
narrowly miss the pedestrians or each other,
raising the noise to hypertensive levels.

I was staring at the most renowned city in the world,
wishing to be in my recent small town of Tel Aviv,
where people, horses and wagons, outnumber cars,
except, of course, for the occasional camel.

Nor was this the worst thing.

Crowds of walkers, eyes dead ahead, hurried on,
as if their life and fortune were at stake.
No street, alley, avenue, sidewalk, or road
was devoid of the heaving, talking, driven man.

Always speaking, some gesticulated, few shouted or whispered.
Now and then I saw one or two leaning against a gray building,
eyeing the hordes as if monitoring entrants to paradise.
So much talking? And all in a strange tongue?

That too wasn't the worst thing.

Then came my first school day in Detroit.
I was standing in front of a blackboard,
before a class of children, younger than my age of nine,
watching them gawk and laugh at me.

They whispered and jeered, pointing fingers,
and I comprehending not a word.

That was the worst thing.

I felt myself shrink down to a sparrow
and flit out an open window.