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THE FIRST TIME

The first time I came by bus up the old winding road,
Through Bab el-Wad with its skeleton trucks
then still where they had been burnt out in '48,
or just dragged aside.

The first time, the bus drove down Jaffa Road,
Before the market, one-story store-front shops,
of tinkers, carpenters, and small goods.

Down to the old Egged station on Jaffa Road,
just up from Zion square, and the small, single storied
city with the Jerusalem restaurant, where you could buy
a ticket on Friday for Shabbat lunch.

No Old City then, with its water cisterns, its alleys,
its Naomi Shemer romance,
but just great concrete walls, too high to look over,
because of the snipers on the city wall corner
at Allenby Square.

Israel was a dozen years old,
I was not twice that, but
I was home then, home.

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