

SURVEY OF THE WOUND
A Collection of Poems

by

Priscilla Wathington

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GHAZAL: FIRE

Now I lay me down to sleep in a westerly plain fire.
I am a trapped beast in this prairie of hay and chain fire.

Language comes to me with pinecones' and needles' breath.
She says, *Only a blazing like mine can restrain fire.*

Did Bushnell gesture to Bouazizi, the street vendor,
whose fruit cart was kindling in Ben Ali's disdain, fire?

There are some who'd jail us for every soul we've lit.
What is free burn? the pigeon asks a detained fire.

Like a sequoia, I'm not easily fried. Many a bark
saw their inner sugars still, dark, while I? I entertain fire.

Do you remember that choking day when the sun never rose?
Even the bar of soap was gritty with yet uncontained fire.

A nurse patiently searches for my vein's rivermouth.
Should I die, I pray my name to wake profane fire.

JOB VACANCY: GHOST

Our team is currently seeking a highly motivated individual who is not confined by the mortal limits of sleep, blockades, etc., and whose natural state is a restless circling. The desired candidate must possess a working knowledge of what's left of this country and its haunted possibilities, while also keeping abreast of developing grant opportunities. To be considered, all Ghost candidates must demonstrate a strong grasp of audience hostility and/or despair, and provide a sample of past writings that live on in other bodies, under other names.

Primary responsibilities will include maintaining a register of words that impart authority which can also compete in an increasingly crowded global marketplace for crisis attention. The register must be updated hourly. The Ghost must be prepared to invent new sounds for a scale of suffering never known before that combine a viral quality with uncompromising accuracy. At times, duties may also necessitate uttering what can never be unuttered, and this is a risk which all candidates must weigh soberly, when considering applying.

Additionally, the Ghost will be expected to ceaselessly scour deleted footage of both past and present rapidly developing events on the ground, including from formal and informal sources, in order to verify their credibility, draw analysis, and/or tourniquet our hemorrhaging history—but live outside it, as a neutral party. To this end, the successful candidate will be required to sign a non-disclosure, agreeing to never claim the worlds they write.

DEAR LOST CITY,

So I can feel my body, I let it burn in the sun.
Watch my thighs slowly brown
until they reach their old hill hue.

But I'm not with you, in those hills.

I'm tacked here,
in the little wooden patio
against the silverfishing BART.
Snapping corner shots of the bird-tied
municipal lines—stuck little toothpicks
between the mildewed yards.

I'm with—I'm of—another city.
This Daly City, cooked with cars. Soon, she'll heave
September's mid-day heat onto her bared shoulders,
carry her coastal summer to San Bruno's base,
and start the ascent.

On the back side of the mountain
I imagine her as some cousin of ours: blending
strawberry smoke, rice fumes, exhaust, into invisible
rivers of yeast; summoning
droplets of lovers' plans up from foam—
until the cool comes fountaining
down, white and thick.

I keep trying to feel your old heat: bluer than blue,
the poppies tonguing their source of fuel,
the laundry lazily frying
atop a gas horizon —

but you're not here at all.

Here, the sun is down. I shiver into the kitchen,
where a tray of mint curls and grays
like hair in the oven.

I need to believe the mountain won't
slide me with the joggers, graywacke
down the thorny steps;
that her gusts won't swarm me
into sound.

For, in the evenings,
we are all like that ridge:

awash with spores, travelers
fog-crawling beneath
a cream pie moon.

Carrot seeds take off from their little plots—
who knows what plans they make for themselves?

And I? I prop the dead palm tree
in my patio up
again, with a brick.

BEFORE I WAS MYSELF

I was her: beloved doll
on a garden swing.

All the animals she stopped seeing. The angels
who came down to dress

her in tatreez and blackberry crowns.
When flames took a city

our black curls melted
onto fracturing cheeks.

Our honey eye got stuck open
watching the burned enter the street. They are still entering.

SURVEY OF THE WOUND

1. Around your wound, draw a circle. Make it a chart:

- a. Bodily tissue
- b. Ruh
- c. Other losses: We played outside, beside the jeeps.

2. You be the decider of your story!

- A "TENSION"!
- An "ANCIENT FORCE"!
- A book sleeve of an axed tree

3. Now, draw a line to this slice. Use a ruler. Label it:

- a. _____ percentage: a lack of child-friendly space
 - b. _____ sliver: an iron deficient womb
 - c. _____ overwhelming majority: And we swam in a salt lake with unexploded mines.
-

4. Who will get what? (50 words or less)

Our dolls floated face down in the lake. One blondie, whose hair I had cut, made an asymmetric halo. I stirred her in.

5. Movements & Escapes:

a. How arrested were you this quarter?

- i. _____ while asleep?
- ii. _____ while awake?

b. How tall were your barbs?

- i. _____ in syllables?
- ii. _____ in jobs?

c. On a scale of 1-10, with one being the lowest possible score, how thick is the skin around your traffic valves? __1_2_3_4_5_6_7_8_9_10 (Circle one)

- i. If 7 or higher, how do you deal with this? But my breasts keep sensing a churning. But my breasts keep producing a green milk.
-

6. Check all that apply:

- يا أرضي يا أرض الجدود
- This knife: Balfour
- A flying checkpoint dragged into the sea
- This bursting night: a somnambulant breeze

7. Measure! Measure!

- a. How many clocks your hour of need? _____
- b. How indigo your waiting? _____
- c. How measured your measuring? _____
- d. Additional comments: The aroma of cardamom on my father's breath. A bright flock. These will go unmeasured.

AND THE MOON WATCHES YOU, TOO

through the skylight in your bathroom
the bandage falling off
your baby toe, crooked again
as you squat on the toilet
your underwear the brown-red
of a tired rebellion
your blood-stained, middle-aged
dissent. And now
she's fixing on you:

your wan, upturned face
too placid to remind her of the stunned deer
she buried on the ferny road last week;
too lit—flashing, even—
for a surface in retrograde, pocked
by dried seas. Like you're amassing
your own dazzling. Like upon this cowed
horizon: you, a dawn.

EIGHTH STATION OF THE CROSS

Under this arc of white stone, Jesus said:
Daughters of Jerusalem,
do not weep for me, but weep
for yourselves—

Carrying five wooden daughters
in his apron, a carpenter asks:
“Should I give them eyes?”
And his customer hands him ten grains
of rice, two for each,
saying, “That they may eat,
if sight is a blighted
crop like Gaza’s strawberries.”

—and for your children. For behold,
the days are coming when they will say—

“Would it be better to have mouths
or not?” the carpenter asks.
And the customer’s child offers her small
bottle of oil, the last remaining descendant
of an olive grove in Al-Khader,
saying, “If the lights go out,
this can burn.”

‘Blessed are the barren’
thus Jesus hallowed the empty
wombs and the rashy breasts
desperately sucked by wasting babes.
He blessed them not from the sky
but on the Roman-laid road,
as one who must continue walking
toward a skull.

After carefully wrapping them in newspaper
and laying the daughters down
together in a box, the carpenter tucks
an olive pit rosary around them. “Something
to climb,” he whispers. “Should the walls
tank, the Earth crater.”

Behold, the days come.
The daughters open their ant-eaten eyes.
The oil spills.

They call to the mountains: *Fall on us!*
To the hills: *Cover us!*

SEA LEGS

Again, white stripes—phosphorous—
and the footage shakes.

I try to hear a word. To translate a shaking
[]. When I ask my mother, she says: *The sea*

is so blue there. I know she is talking about the blue-licked
salt on her husband's sheets.

She is looking at a younger woman's hands
carrying the drained cups to the sink.

Even as the shoes sewage into the sea.
Even as the sardines waded in the sludge.

Thirty summers after
those cups were put away

she tells me she spoke to a phantom
last night. There was no reason

for [] to answer the stranger's call
as bombs bludgeoned, missing the sea.

And now I'm making videos
of infants born in Al-Shifa hospital

with atrial septal defects.
And my mother dials

wrong numbers again and again, as locations, as sound, as []: garbles

all

AFTER SHE LEAVES

I curl in my mother's
imprint

temporal occupant
with stray silvers

sometimes a resident
blue heron will come

watch me breathe her
Chanel No 5

from the pillow
a limp tunnel animal

in its beak
sometimes I'm giving

birth in a lysolled bed
and she's in this room again

watching the gopher shake
until its neck breaks or

in the hull of an afternoon
our four frayed hands

smooth the gray herringbone
quilt as she narrates: *There, the Great Blue*

Heron stood motionless, scanning —
her eyes dark birds entering a cloud

BROKEN MY ،*ARABIYYA

~after Marwa Helal's "poem to be read from right to left"

fall you nest a is language Sometimes

—hole a there's Maybe. of out

.pushed [] a

coop the flew mother the day 1 :Or

.food wasn't found she what بس

when And .was it Or

it ate you

(alphabet this)

.bird a longer no were you

*شخصية تتكلم اللغة العربية

SOMETIMES, WHEN I TRY TO TYPE WORLD

I type *wolf*.

As in: *The sun is setting over my part of the wolf right now.*

As in: *Anywhere in the wolf but here.*

What I know is the old home
is always playing her best hits:
again I'm in that pink room
listening to Beit Hanina's eastern hills,
her wild dogs' hymns.
First, the base notes —
rumble tones — desire.
Then, that high-flung crescendo. That moon peal.

As in: *The wolf is at your fingertips.*

As in: *That was a different life, a different wolf.*

Here, we visit the Mexican gray wolf brothers,
Garcia, Prince, and Bowie,
at the San Francisco Zoo;
watch them trot ragged circles in the dirt
for children with their tongues out.
A sign outside their enclosure reads:
“Please refrain from howling.”
In a red circle, a silhouette of a howling
wolf is x'ed out. My son asks,
“Shouldn't it be a howling man?”

As in: *He's carrying the wolf on his shoulders.*

As in: *It's not the end of the wolf.*

In what may be the earliest version
of *Red Riding Hood*, a mother goat sets off
for the woods to find food
for her family, leaving her young behind.
This is where the wolf finds them—
hiding in their own home.
But in Europe, it is the child who is sent out
from the home (which is already full of food,
by the way) into the woods:
red and scented.

As in: *I feel alone in this wolf.*

As in: *She's not long for this wolf.*

When my son bores of fairy tales,
I make up a real thriller
about a mama, with a long, dark braid,
just like mine. Every night at 9,
her faint, bleached mustache would grow
foul and bushy; her neat piano
fingernails turn sickly sharp.
Then she'd tear out of that beige
duplex on Bowley—
"That's enough stories," he'd say.

He'd say: "I'm asleep."
As in: *I'm dead to the wolf.*

INTERVIEW WITH A PALESTINIAN-AMERICAN POET IN THE AFTERMATH

1. What is your earliest memory of words? Do you support Hamas?
2. ~~When did you first become afraid of your own words?~~ Do you support Hamas?
3. ~~Are you afraid now?~~ Do you support Hamas?
4. ~~Where does the imagination live—inside the body or outside of it?~~ Do you support Hamas?
5. ~~Is the same true for hope?~~ Do you support Hamas?
6. ~~Or has hope become a stick that beats the poet?~~ Do you support Hamas?
7. ~~What about memory—and by this, I do not mean the official kind, but, rather, yours. Does it blow a whistle or a horn?~~ Do you support Hamas?
8. ~~If you had a second life, or a third, what would you do with it?~~ Do you support Hamas?
9. ~~And if you had known all of this could happen, would you still want words?~~ Do you support Hamas?
10. Do you support Hamas?
11. Do you support Hamas?

DO YOU SUPPORT HAMAS

Do YOU SUPPORT

HAm@S???

DEAR LANGUAGE OF OPPORTUNITY,

You, with your tongue
against the backs of teeth.

You, of *abbbbbb*,
of *sssssss*.

Let me ask you this:
which one of us the drum's

old skin & which
the stick? You know

why I'm asking.
You've been bargaining again.

Death was spreading its fungus
on a fig; eating tomorrow's honey.

Don't say you did what you could.
Don't give me lessons on the wasp

that burrows into the center, losing her wings.
A truck with body bags came in.

People took what they needed.
What did they need?

They needed a cup of flour.
They needed an iron pill.

But instead, you were—where?
whose?

The people counted:

"One."
"One."
"One."

Oh Language, what
hush you made below.

SAID TO ME:

As someone who has studied
the Middle East a great deal, actually

When you born, you were covered in hair
bear cub of mine
I hope you keep it all

When I met you, I wasn't sure where your borders were
how I could in you
how I could out

If only the Arabs could have produced a Gandhi!
What I'm saying is: I'm on your side

*you wanted to braid pearls
in my hair*

Well, I like part of you

But Americans are full of cancer
Cancer and CNN

The good part

Because you were made in Chicago
that's why you're a cub

The American part

There are bullets in this board
Do you see?

The Palestinian part

But the Arabs don't know how to stand in lines
they huddle, they clump

Don't measure the rice
that is for the ejanib

you wanted

What is that song about the bird?
How did the forest fly?

If only the Arabs had their own Ben-Gurion!
If only you had a head for math!

Leave the trees to the white poets

Do you see? A "bullet-in" board!

I could be your brother
3yoon 3sali

We have girls like you
where I'm from

In America, you go to work
and go home. See nothing.

*and you wanted to braid my hair with olive leaves
to rub olive oil into my scalp*

Leave to them the flowers and the farms

My grandmother's name is Mary
Do you see?

But did your mother sing the old songs?
But what did your mother sing?

For weight, I wrote: "4 Jaffa oranges"

*and you wanted to photograph me
in a field of queen's lace*

Don't measure the water
Write nothing about this

What's your name's root?

I recognize you, sister
3leykum as-salam

What is your grandfather's name?
and your grandfather's grandfather's name?

What is the root's root?

For hair, I wrote: "the finest fur"

Your 3yn is too milky.
Say 3yoon again.

*you wanted to photograph me
in a kufiyah and kubl*

In America, they forget even their names
They eat, and forget

Now, translate this song.
Again.

*you wanted to remove the hair from my back
my forehead too*

But I saw a picture of you
I saw you write “home”

Will you eat the old kind of cancer
or the kind they import?

you wanted and wanted

What do you mean by “BACK”?
What do you mean by “HERE”?

If only the Palestinians loved peace
My bumper sticker says: “COEXIST”

My grandmother’s name is a country

*you wanted and
wanted and wanted*

No, I mean where are you really from?
And before that, where?

In your baby book, I wrote: “a bruise”

THE NUMBERS

That year, our numbers were anxious.
One mathematician said that the future now
required acrobatical calculations.
To illustrate this point,
she bought a pair of fins and disappeared
near the shoreline.

Nouns began drifting into one
another—little pots of paint
slowly bleeding into a sticky pool.

For example, we couldn't tell
what was a key or a spoon. In practical terms,
this meant that when I tried to eat
my soup, I could hear a padlock clack.

Like our disasters
we were evolving.

I wanted to say we were lungfish
converting our bladders into respirators—
but the reversals made it hard to say
in which dimension our numbers
were repeating or what infogram
we might elude.

In the next phase, I saw a bulldozer
protecting the street
from its sidewalk
(which wanted some water).

Still later: my house began menstruating
through its giant green shutters.
Then, a pair of pants appeared
on the roof and wouldn't stop screaming,
Empty your bags!

Our mysteries made heads
and lines.

Fearing what was ahead, one boy hid
his heart behind his diaphragm.

One man devoted himself to digging a hole.
How many grains of sand would he move?
Who would count?

2008 – []

Say we'll be the Lazarus, not the thing that keeps

the siege curtailed :

: Jericho, as her place of residence

: a lucrative market for crops like strawberries

: the purpose of visiting the sick

: decades of key developments

a hand busy; a tray to pass and collect time or debt.

Oslo I and Oslo II :

The Protocol Concerning Safe Passage :

Article 42 of the Hague :

: a fish dead in the water

When we grow soft and skin-chewed, assemble us not from scraps

which are now chronic :

: merchant permits

: the Population Registry

: a meat paste on the roof of the mouth

: medical exit permits

Give us not the stalwart hands which wrap the disappearing

He neither received a rejection nor

any other status

beloved in fragrant strips.

GRANT PROPOSAL FOR YOUR EMERGENCY

1. Objective: To hold my beloved's hand by the sea.

2. Please describe your project in as much detail as possible:

My hair will fly into my lover's mouth
and we will smile until the facial muscles
can pull upwards no more. Then, we will enter the sea.
Swill every blue tincture.

3. What is the nature of your emergency?

What is the nature of your fund?

4. Projected outcomes:

- My lover's terrible drawing of the sea
- A slowly emptied pot of mahshi
- One photograph of my beloved's back entering the sea, palms raised
as though to say, *It's not too cold*

5. What investments will your project require?

For my beloved's hand to be pulled out of a witness' testimony
and returned to me. The past to not be a bleeding
visitor who asks why the ambulance never arrives.

6. Proposed budget:

Description of Item	Estimated Cost
To lean on my lover's shoulder and point at jumping fish	
To ask, <i>Do you see there, where the sea turns peacock?</i>	
To watch four children run on the shoreline without, without.....	
To fall asleep on the sand, wrapped in my mother's turquoise shawl	
To write our firstborn's initials on each other's wrists	
To dip bread in sesame and share it with pigeons	
To say, <i>Let's grow old as this neon sky</i>	
Total	I refuse to quantify

7. Please provide a schedule of deliverables:

And you can find the report of what we did tied to a kite

MINNEAPOLIS, OCTOBER 2023

for all my RAWI & Mizna family

All the Lenas were there. And the Summers too. And your perfumed hair defied gravity. And mine got drunk on that good gym water.

And we did not say what they wanted during the mic check. Did not become shroud, nor keep polite company with a polished shelf.

And my California jacket was somehow shelter from the rubble squall. Your shedding Texas pleather said, *I'll do*

what I can. And I'm proud that I wept and refused to stop. I loved the teeth of all of us

that chewed long into the masonry. We were what we wanted: abundant, heavy, sweet.

To be the ones who pulled the moon down and up. Who rose and ululated. Who lived so voluminously, we had to draw new decades onto our charts.

Whose speech was birds of paradise bathed in eastern light.

INTERVIEW WITH A PALESTINIAN-AMERICAN POET IN THE AFTERMATH

Interviewer: ~~What is your earliest memory of words?~~ Do you support Hamas?

Poet: I come from the time of pinecones.

Interviewer: ~~When did you first become afraid of your own words?~~ Do you support Hamas?

Poet: There was a swing I used to love. And the ground was covered in snobar.

Interviewer: ~~Are you afraid now?~~ Do you support Hamas?

Poet: One night, a soldier came to the door in the middle of the night and asked for all the men. Someone said “American.” Someone said, “Arab.”

Interviewer: ~~Where does the imagination live—inside the body or outside of it?~~ Do you support Hamas?

Poet: The morning was a siren. And in East Jerusalem, authorities were distributing gas masks in individual cardboard boxes with long black straps, like a purse.

Interviewer: ~~Is the same true for hope?~~ Do you support Hamas?

Poet: Inside the box was my mask and a rolled-up piece of paper around a shot. I was terribly afraid of the jiggly man on that paper. It showed him stabbing himself in the thigh with the atropine, while he shook. I was ten, maybe nine.

Interviewer: ~~Or has hope become a stick that beats the poet?~~ Do you support Hamas?

Poet: There are words, and there are words.

Interviewer: ~~What about memory—and by this, I do not mean the official kind, but, rather, yours. Does it blow a whistle or a horn?~~ Do you support Hamas?

Poet: On decorate-your-gas-mask box day, I drew three fat roses in the corner, where the atropine would roll.

Interviewer: ~~If you had a second life, or a third, what would you do with it?~~ Do you support Hamas?

Poet: I ate my fill from pinecones.

Interviewer: ~~And if you had known all of this could happen, would you still want words?~~ Do you support Hamas?

Poet: Recently, my mother told me this joke: “Two cockroaches met in paradise. One said, ‘Bug spray?’ The other said, ‘No, slipper.’...”

Interviewer: **Do you support Hamas?**

Poet: But my memory is called Agent. But the Mandate has no atropine.

Interviewer: **Do you support Hamas?**

Poet: “...In this way, they knew which part of the world they came from.”

Interviewer: **DO YOU suPporT hAMaS**

Poet: I remember my tan slippers with the painted silver clasp, the way they almost fell off on the down-swing, with my legs pulled tight under me.

Interviewer: **Do YOU SUPPoRT**

HAm@S???

Poet: The rush of wind, as I stretched my legs out. Then, half-way into the trees, I'd jump

BROKEN MY, ' ARABIYYA

~after Marwa Helal's "poem to be read from right to left"

.horizons 2 to tilled, 'tongue
stashed a was I Moussa Like

tongue one with reeds the in child
.Queen the praise & milk mother's my suck to

commas 2 between tall grow might I That
.me flurried & fed which

, ' ,

balloon white a on suspended camera a Because
.ع our over moon a like hung

beds wool their in up woke grandmothers Because
.country new a in immigrants sudden

missing went words Because
.mouths mothers their^l inside still

, ' ,

sails broken 2 given was I So
with flap to

apart wide so me take to tills 2
—snake's a like, 'split tongue my

.No
.sea a Like

, ' ,

أما زللنا لل في الداخل

FROM THE PACIFIC TO THE MEDITERRANEAN

At 2 am, I wake choking.
The air is full of dust.

I drag myself to the window. Pull open the glass.
Outside: a woman is floating

in her nightdress. She is holding on
to the power line

like a bee holds on
to a flower. She is drinking

something—her face is bright
—lit. When she sees me, she says, *Please.*

So, I reach my hands out to her
and she throws a wooden

kitchen chair to me. It is shaky,
like the screws

have all but given up.
Heavy, too. More weight

than I know how to hold.
To stop myself from falling

out the window, I lean
back, brace

myself; heave.
Now, the chair in my arms, I see

that clinging to the legs are 10,000
tiny children. They cry, *Will it hurt*

when the bomb falls?
What should I tell them? I shout out to her.

The woman says, *Speak.*
I must go now, bring their mothers this electricity.

Then, she flies off toward the ocean,
where I see four hellfire missiles screaming toward her—

but four blue whales leap up,
swallow them whole.

Then I look out the window to my right,
where the miles of boulevards

bleed toward the highway
and thousands upon thousands

of pencils and markers walk toward
the overpass chanting *Cease Cease*.

The road becomes a children's drawing.
So many stars that the night no longer

fits onto the page at all. And the poem
begins instead with dawn.

Dear Reader,
Wake up.

DALY CITY COUNCIL MEETING, ITEM 16

~after Layli Long Soldier

And we are not here to be spice on this bland earth.
Not to throw fists. And not because we are descendants
of this language, although we are its inheritance,
its kingdom come. Not to be photographed,
although we say what we say in public.
One minute or less to be for or against fire.
One minute to say, *Have you seen the mothers
cradling their daughters in a field of white bags?*
One minute to say holy city, all of us
here, in the folding chairs surrounded by a choke
of police. We the syllables that come up for air
at the podium. We fragment and em-dash
the best we can before the council's golden seal.
Whereas 290 buses full of schoolchildren bombed.
Whereas my brother spilled, my cousin
of unknown status since Monday. *Where-*
as if two-thirds of this city devoured by rocks.
Be it Further Resolved, we'll walk these stairs in two weeks
once more, to wrestle with symbols and shrouds.
Be it our salve to enter into the record our love
of the cessation of hostilities. Let it mark us
like our fog: a vast cloud that touches the ground—
salting, wetting every trembling mouth.

GHAZAL: THIS BURSTING NIGHT

The sky rinsed her glossy hands of our lot this bursting night.
God among us, a porpoise in a ghost net, caught this bursting night.

Let the broccoli bolt and go to flower, uneaten;
the fireworks forget themselves and rot this bursting night.

In the dreamers' hours, my beloved haunts an Arabic scale.
No harm will arrest his sojourning, not this bursting night.

Dear gauze city, I'll paint you here: bright bride among coastal looms.
May a frame of henna be your only thought this bursting night.

Shahid's ghazals arrive old and fresh in their commentary.
But who will witness what *dense forests* begot this bursting night?

Once you thrashed a damp wood desperate for a fist of sand.
I, the glass you piped your years into, wrought this bursting night.

What will happen next? the narrator asks a stuffed rabbit.
We'll find our refuge in that dabilia pot, this bursting night.

Oh Poet, what good is signing your name among Latin stems?
No quantity of radifs can clot this bursting night.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ask me what I am, I'll say: I slept in Jerusalem last night.
I didn't drag my suitcase over the earthen barrier, hack
the iron gate. During the exam, the optometrist says
there are some parts of the light field the eye shouldn't
see. I cheated. Looked away from the black box,
drove my car over stalks of khobbeizeh. See how I beg
for attention? How I bury wild rosemary in the pin-
prick where the optic nerve enters your skull?
She says she can show me the subsurface of my cornea
on her monitor, how my vein bulges but doesn't burst.
Some patients have thrown up after seeing. I haven't
vomited since I abandoned my anorexia, swallowed
the spoon instead. My throat is so flexible I could birth
a restaurant called Oasis in Ohio. I could retch sequins
over your rice. At my teta's house in Al-Nasirah, we always
ate fried fish with a side of cracked wheat. My sister
would squeeze the lens out of the fish's eye and look through.
See: a picture of my peeled eye, the smudge where she held
my eyelashes back, pushed me into the light

THIS POEM IS NOT ABOUT THE GENOCIDE

It is about your mother, gorgeous and alive.
I kiss her as I pass her on the street.
I tell you, at eighty, she is healthier and stronger than me.
In the evenings, she leaps across the hills like a freshly sheared sheep.
Nothing harasses her. Not even a mosquito.
She scolds the old moon and washes the jam off its face.
And no one tells her only in the West Bank
is this kind of jumping allowed,
or only in the area called “B” can you wash a friend’s face.
She visits anyone she wants.
Everyone is home.
They say *Come, Come,*
and pass around a tray of overfilled glasses of juice—
not the artificial, syrupy kind sold at cardboard counters,
behind the shutters of tear gassed corners—
but the tangy-sweet juice of an orange
from a 200-year-old orchard in Yaffa,
picked only when it is hanging low and dimpled,
then driven to the market on a smooth and easy road.
In this poem, there are no roadblocks
between Yaffa and your mother’s house.
There are no turnstiles
and no guns.
No soldier lifts out an orange
and chops it up to check
if it is hiding a bomb.
The roads are just roads.
They go here and there,
without tanks and drones.

And the houses stand beside them,
just as they did yesterday and last year,
full of jammy towels and soft words.
And on the stoop outside of one such house,
your mother is learning to play the oud.
The strings twang, as she plucks them curiously.
And the words she sings are like those you might hear anywhere—
something about time, something about life—
too ordinary to record.

NOTES

Survey of the Wound: “tension” and “ancient force” were drawn from the *New York Times Book Review* for Thomas Friedman’s *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, as published on Friedman’s website: <https://www.thomaslfriedman.com/the-lexus-and-the-olive-tree/>; “يا أرضي يا أرض الجدود” is drawn from the beginning of the Palestinian national anthem.

Eighth Station of the Cross: includes quotes and references from the following text, from the NIV Bible: “As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, “Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!” Then ‘they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”’” (Luke 23: 26-30)

Dear Language of Opportunity: the lines, “One.” / “One.” / “One.” are a reference to these lines from Pádraig Ó Tuama’s poem, “The Pedagogy of Conflict”: “...so I count // one life / one life / one life / one life / one life // because each time / is the first time / that life / has been taken.”

Broken, My Arabiyya (2): The Arabic footnote draws from the Palestinian folkloric tradition of imlolah, that most likely traces back to Galilee women during the British or Ottoman periods. See: <https://arablit.org/2024/04/05/resistance-and-the-palestinian-folk-song/>

From the Pacific to the Mediterranean: The line, “Will it hurt, when the bomb falls?” draws from this social media video where a mother in Gaza says her children asked her, “Does it hurt when we get bombarded? Do we feel the pain or do we just die at once?” See: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/U3C2tLcQQ48?app=desktop>

Daly City Council Meeting, Item 16: appropriates some legal phrases from the “Resolution in Support of Peace and an End to the Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza,” which was introduced into the Daly City Council agenda on May 13, 2024. Phrases drawn from the resolution are indicated in italics.

Ghazal: This Bursting Night: “dense forests” draws from this line in Agha Shahid Ali’s ghazal, “Arabic”: “Where there were homes in Deir Yassein, you’ll see dense forests—”; “witness” refers to the meaning of Shahid’s name, which is also referenced in the last line of the same poem: “Listen: it means ‘The Beloved’ in Persian, ‘witness’ in Arabic.”