

Saba Hamzah

1.

Mural of Shes

when my voice was silenced, I chose to write
building a wall from the river of words
coursing through my mind and veins
a canvas for every unspoken thought

this wall will surge like a torrent,
guiding my voice from the mountain spring to the valley's heart
a crutch against the weariness of longing inviting me
to plunge into its lofty depths to write

I'll write of
the absence of
the lingering wait of
the crippling fear
of love
of grief
of imperfections of
taboos
of shame

I will pen everything I yearn
for
and what you resist

I'll write of
dreams of hope
of art of
work
until my wall overflows
from valley to peak
and words resonate like echoes,
carving from my silence a voice

the clouds whisper
the towers of Shibam were my first companions
now, a flood of "her" words ascends
to graze the sky's bridle

nothing echoes like a silenced voice of a woman
bearing sorrow

Loss murmurs:

I ended my life on a mother's shore who lost her
child

vowed I'd never steal love
from their sacred troves as long as I
lived

yet, what's life, but a series of endless waves
of loss
drove me to my own end

Absence sighs:

each arrival ushers another departure in the abyss of
the lofty river

I try to seep to her heart
every mother robbed of her child by war

2.

Soliloquy with Floating Doom: a film-poem

Time is speeding up

earth is diminishing from its edges the seas are raging and despite all that
you still are teeming with life

my mother, her neck inlaid with white coral, says: torrents overflow the city

as they pass the red coral beads between their finger, grandmothers say the rain pours to revive our Arabia Felix

scholars say

black gold and massacres

my mother's coral fuzzes and the rosaries scatter

The fugitive cast himself into the darkness to save the boat and the bodies
after escaping the town

and the torment of the goddess

But you carry the darkness within you

sons of the lord hold you a hostage. Where is the sanctuary?
when death spreads in the ocean and god has abandoned the country

When you lose control of yourself and the world minds that some
would be eaten by the abyss

get lost in the dark

no whale to swallow them

nor land to immortalize your legacy

3.

Lingering Wait

Waiting is a stranger, silently watches you dying
he may take a picture of you
while you are drowning in the depth of anticipation
or ignite your longing fire
to make him a cup of coffee

Waiting is dying
it seems to you that it is the last hours of your patience, journey,
you feel your soul leaving your body
only the eagerness to arrive brings you back to life

waiting is a prickly pear
its leaves are embroidered with thorns
and your tender heart with the fire of longing

Waiting is acquiescence
it is you, as you have never been
a mint leaf in a cup of tea
the heat damages you
and the joy of meeting grows out of your aroma

4.

Your Grandmother's Scent

Here are the lilies striving to pierce the cold winter's hymen,
Tearing it apart into blossoms
and from her blood
winter creates the colors of spring
and my basil, a faded withered flower,
my mother gently dried it
and filled a pillow with it

This is your grandmother's scent she
whispered
Let it travel with you
so we become, the three of us,
as a lavender
Violet hanging in a flowering branch

5.

Nothing looks like me possessed by the slip of
fate
since the god made me from the water of the sad tears and my mother shed me in
tears
after carrying me with sadness upon sadness for a whole year

Nothing looks like me
me, the one standing in front of the shadow without me
out cold when insomnia lulls my eyes
" memory without a body"

Nothing looks like me me, the thirty-
year-old
With no name or address
the stranger in my land farewell
before life began
and returning from the depths of the unknown without hope...

nothing resembles me when I wake up
in a dream searching for my voice
my scent my
poetry
and I search within my palm for me and when my eyes
meet her fading star

I do not see me in her traveling lights
nothing resembles me when I wake up with no eyes
I drink my coffee with the smell of absence
and I spin around myself
participate perhaps with the clock in creating time to recreate me.

6.

Burn in Silence

Dammed up crater erupted upon my shoulders
crafting from my back a lava trail for a river of flames I rolled down the stairs
leading to the valley
to drown me in a river or a creek Yet never did

I reach

I became ashes before my skeletal structure learned about fractures
my body should have seen those bruises
that could have colored it if not for its
burning
and perhaps realized,
that a cast body is better than ashes
scattered between the mountain and the valley

but what can she do?
a woman who is afraid of stones being thrown at her,
or abandoned to die bleeding until her male guardian comes
so what if she burns?
and turns to ashes quietly ..
no one will like the noise of her cracking bones, when fleeing
and should she break again,
to be mended

burn in silence
for the wise and old say:
the woman is created for patience,
that a woman is created from a crooked rib
to learn the meaning of a distorted life without complaining
to live with clipped wings and die vied in deep shadows

despite the decision I made to leap, to break that
unjust bend in my heart
the boiling magma in my memory of ink and blood had risen to the highest
point on my shoulder
and erupted

7.

the sole survivor

In the conversation that lasted until 3 AM, she questioned, "Has
not the hour come
to forge a means of connection
that would bridge the chasm between my life and your death
and when her mobile screen danced and turned white like a shroud, she hurried to the mirror to
apply her own red lipstick.
but then she remembered
how they wrapped his remains in a shroud stained with the blood of his comrades,
so she adjusted the settings of adoration
and on the anniversary of the cake,
the sole survivor from his birthday party
enlivened by the angel of death,
another shell fell
and put out her final breath8-

O Yemeni!

Where do you get all this hope from?

-from my existence.

ago in the presence of future

9.

Don't Come Back

My mother says do not

come back

do not count the days

Your home is where you are

your home is what provides you bread when hunger awakens in your land

your home is the one that grants you peace if you lay your head to dream,

unafraid of the sound of shells and if you step into the wind, unafraid of minefields

my mother, holding the embers of patience and longing, says do not count the days

don't come back

your home is what grants me tranquility,

your home is where you are, and here lies the graveyard.

10.

Stranded –ya ghorba :a song

How unjust, being abandoned how unjust,
my departing when war was announced
and it was time for exile

Pained and stranded, mom when I miss you in
the morning
while my nights are full of agonizing heartache

Damn exile
breeze and rain feel different our passion,
gone

who dares end this endless journey?

O' smell of coffee, o' smell of basil
filling my mom's house, and my dad's heart

The way we used to meet in Attan on Fridays

Being together meant the world

Gather, sing and dance

mourning our loss of one's self, pal

Gather, sing and dance

The dismal fear intensifies my
wounds my heart is barely alive

no one even fathoms

Only God knows, the said and the unsaid the said and the
unsaid

This is hopefully coming to a cheerful end

O' you, one of paradisiac beauty
closer to my heart than my soul It's time to
have us back
have mercy on me, o' pal

Translated from the Arabic by Majed Awadi

The Arabic word *ghorba* reflects a unique feeling of an overwhelming state of homesickness. Arabs abroad or in exile use the term in poetic ways remembering what it used to be at home before turning ... outlandish. Ghorba has no verbatim translation in most other languages and cultures of the term or the feelings it carries with it.
