

Homeira QADERI

If It Would Rain Again

They fall off your waist onto your feet. The last punch hole of the belt doesn't fit. The pants fold over the zipper. Folds of a long black skirt. Your curious look is fixed on the ruffles of the drape, on the ribbon tied around it. You are brimming with [eagerness]. It is cold out there.

Yet, it seems doable. You peek in. You rummage deep in the cupboard among things. In the dim light, you spot a rubber band and scissors. In front of a window you pull up the pants, size the rubber band for your waist and snip it smaller. You head for the cupboard to put the scissors back. Your glance falls on the mirror. One side of your mustache looks smaller. You take the black eyebrow pencil from the window ledge and darken up the mustache. You pick up the lantern from the ground and hold it at eye level. You look more carefully. It's OK. Your upper lip has swollen a little. It hurts, too. You smile, but the smile is now buried behind your black mustache. Your checkered-temple eyeglasses have masked your beautifully-colored eyes. Your blonde eyebrows, which you have darkened with kohl, can hardly be seen from above their edge. The stocking cap has covered half of your forehead. You pull it up. It has a printed pattern, striped and narrow. You roll up the collar of your sweater and cover your neck. It reaches below your belly, even a little lower. Your thighs are thin and hairy, so are your calves. It has been two-three months since you shaved them. Your hanging pants can't be seen in the mirror. You tighten the rubber band around the waist of the pants. You buckle the belt, and are done.

You go by the side of the stream and walk against the flow. The double doors are framed by the tall and short walls. The wind rattles the heavy knockers. It is getting dark. The wind undulates the water and creates waves. Tiny waves that go on and on, rolling over and over one another. You gaze at the water. You can't see the waves. You hear them. You know those tiny waves. Now there is no wind. It was restless.

The father's door was shut as well. The wind hit gently the knocker against the door. It is as if a little child's light knock on the door. You pause for a while and stare at the walls and at a tree whose branches are arched over the alley, and it seems to you that they have never arched over the wall.

You look at the water in the stream which never overflows: it reaches below your knees, again you wait for a flood.

That night it overflowed. There were winds, the gurgle of water, faint commotion. When you came out, the water had already flooded the migrant's lands- -the land full of tents, the land of the Chaghcharan people. They came here because of the draught: "the mean sky, the land burnt, cows and sheep burnt, people burnt." You had overheard the whisper of an old man who immersed his legs in the water: "The watermelons were burnt." You had heard the tremor in the voice of a boy eating mulberries---seedless mulberries in the crown of the mulberry tree by the stream.

The water shook the poles of the tents and uprooted the stakes, rolled over pillows and blankets. There were clunks in the water. The dishes hit one another deep in the water. The land was low. They had now crossed the stream. Here the water was reaching just up to their shins, not their thighs. The basements were flooded. The water reached the base of the *takhtbam*¹ deck. The round yellow lights which wind could blow out were moving in raised hands. They ran, and stopped. The refugees were standing too, waiting for someone to do something.

A shivering old man said: "You, women! Bring sacks in case water comes up to the *takhtbamhs*. Fill them up and put them around the decks."

Mom had put her *burqua*² chador on the tree, and so had you. She had tucked her pleated skirt into her white pants, and so had you. The water was pushing the skirt against your pants, and your pants around your legs. It hurt and didn't hurt. You were filling the sacks, and so were the refugees, who then picked them up and put them around the *takhtbamhs*. A woman kept whispering "the dishes were washed away, the water took the tents."

The water didn't stop at the walls. They were redirecting it from the basements to the alleys. The stream had broken but the water settled in its usual course. The children didn't want to go outdoors. The mud was flat and fine. Shoes were stuck in it. Tents, erected and not. The migrants were on one of the stream. The women, relaxed, put on their wet, colorful, flowered *charghad* scarves,³ which went down to their waists. Their braids were on their breasts. As usual. They went to give a hand to the helpless, if any. You saw their bare arms and you wished to be among the people on the other side of the stream. You put on a colorful *charghad* and strands of your hair fell on your breasts, and your breasts moved freely, and your arms were half-bare. Yet mom put on her

1 A raised platform in a yard, used during the summer as a sitting area.

2 A type of a long woman's veil, covering nearly the whole body.

3 A type of long scarf for women, usually patterned and colorful.

burqua, and so did you. It hung in neat heavy folds behind your legs and its front part covered you belly. You felt it clutching your waist and pressing your breasts until they were melting. You felt dizzy and breathed loudly. You wished you could throw yourself in the water, which would have taken your chador and the strands of your hair and your clothes and yourself, and if you stayed, you wanted to take the dishes to the stream. The sun touches your skin, and your skin shines, and your bangles gleam, and you sport a green mole tattoo between your eyebrows, and you become a villager.

The villagers left. The other side of the stream is deserted. A shoe is or isn't there. You could put on the chorghad but the flood doesn't come. The water has ebbed, and your wish is unsatisfied. You didn't tuck your shirt into your pants and didn't go out. You didn't get a chance. And every night you had a dream that there is flood and that it flooded the basements and stopped at the walls and made them wet. And you hung your burqua on the tree, and the flood washed away the tree and the chador, and you had cried "flood, flood!" and it had returned--the flood did--and it gave back the chador but not the tree and you had cried "chador the flood, flood the chador." Mom had woken you up. The chador was hanging from a nail in front of you. Flood? Don't say that word, my daughter. God forbid that the flood would come. God is compassionate. And mom's voice echoed: "my daughter is totally panicked. She is restless."

When you received your first *eid*,⁴ there was a new burqua. They said: a married woman should have a new burqua. Mom gave your old burqua to the woman next door, who had said, "my daughter is mature but doesn't have a burqua."

Yet your burqua is new, with more frills and a front part that covers your thighs. You moved to Aref's place from your father's, and still dream every night that the flood comes, stops at the walls to wet them, overflows the basements, doesn't cover the takhtbamhs, and washes away the tree but not your chador. You cry "flood, flood!" and it returns and sweeps away another tree but not your chador. And you again "chador the flood, flood the chador."

He touched his thick forelock and said: "There is no flood, sweetie, it came and went in one night." And your hair was not in strands, and your chador wasn't washed away, it was hung from the nail, and Aref, with his dark brown clothes and shoes whose gleam you could see halfway across the alley, and his height towering over you, was just around the curve of the alley. You ran to the stream

⁴ A gift that newlywed men or women receive on eids--important, happy Islamic holidays.

but you didn't pull up your chador, and the sun didn't touch your skin, and your skin didn't shine, and neither did your bangles.

You were scared and went in and sat behind the door, and the water came in through the openings under your feet and you were lifted from the soft ground, and sailed around the house on the water but nowhere was wet. When Aref was away for three days, you thought more about the days when you yearned for the charghad and asked your mom, "Why don't they put on a chador?" and you wanted to ask, why don't we put on a charghad and your mother whispered, as if to herself, "my mom used to say: a farm woman doesn't wear a chador. How can she harvest? How can she move those warps, every one of them, back and forth?" And you wanted to harvest and work at the carpet loom, and didn't want to be an urban girl. You wanted the sunlight and the moonlight⁵ to see you, and Sattar, the boy next door, too. You wanted to go with him to the mosque again and carry the Qur'an, and share your piece of bread with him, and he would give you some green plums from his bag. But you said this to the tree, the stream and the wall, and to a little to the girl next door. Aref's absence gave you freedom, but every night you had to go to your father's. Aref had said: "It is not good for new bride to be alone." It was the second night by yourself. The rain of the month of Taurus⁶ carried you away to the past. You have heard that we would have a beautiful spring this year. Until midnight you were looking at gutters that were burbling. Your view was of the window panes and of end of the yard. You wished the land wouldn't suck in the water. Mom said: "Sleep, sweetie. Wherever he is, God bless him. He will come happily." And you wanted it to come and come again. Your head was under the blanket, and your heart was at end of the yard, under the gutter, and you were getting wet and your heart was like a brimming stream. And your mom's voice was pouring: "My daughter is so restless." And you dreamed the flood has come, that it stopped at the wall, overflowed the basement, and then you heard "flood, flood!" and quickly tucked your shirt in your pants and the chador was left hanging on the nail and you heard that the tent poles have been uprooted and the pillows and blankets washed away, and you were hearing the dishes being swept away, and the water washed away the children.

You have run out with your hair in loose strands down your back, and the yellow lights hurt your eyes. They traveled quickly, in raised hands, then stopped, and you too stopped suddenly and the gurgling voice of water turned into laughter and your feet weren't wet. Sattar was laughing, Aref too. In the stream the women's pants, under their chadors, and the children pants, had trapped air

5 The idiom "the sunlight and moonlight haven't seen her" is used to refer to girls who have never been outdoors, and never been in a relationship with the opposite sex.

6 21 April-21 May

and made bubbles, and they were laughing. Sattar saw your face and you were not carrying Qur'an and a piece of bread to share with him, and you wished that the flood came and took you and you cried "Oh, flood, Oh, flood!" And mom woke you up and you were wet with sweat. You had put your hand on your throat and your whole body was burning.

You stayed up until the morning and were disappointed with everyone, with the boy next door with whom you'd often shared your bread and angry with yourself, wishing you hadn't accepted his green plums. Early morning, you said to mom that you had to clean the house because Aref would come the next day and went back to your home. You could hear: "She can't wait. She is newly-wed."

A man on his bike was singing and the wind pushed your sweater against your body and made your breasts stick out. Before coming close to him, you put your hands over your mouth so your breasts would be buried by your arms. The man says: "Hello dear brother." and you mutter back, "Hello dear brother" under your breath. The man casts a quick glance at you and you reach for your belt and your breasts are wandering. The man moves on. The round yellow lights are nearing, one back and one in front. Your hands are covering your mouth and your breasts are hidden again. When they are before you, the silence of the alley is shattered. "All is safe." And not only your heart but also your whole body trembles. You feel that it is the first time you hear this, and the voice says again: "All is safe." The man who greets you says: "Dear fellow, you had better take a lantern. You may fall into the stream. It is full of water." And you whisper "Liar" and the man says: "You may bump into a stone or something." And you to yourself; "May water wash me, and the children, and the dishes away, right?" And your smile is buried behind your black mustache. The man in the front says: "See, the curfew is being enforced." The man behind raises the lantern up to his chest and you reach for your belt when the men leave. You look back. The lights move with the moving feet, and wind pushes through the lantern's sphere, and the flames dance and rise. You overhear: "A poor dumb thing." And you wet your mouth with your tongue. You take one of your hands off your belt and the other off your chest and hold them out against the wind. The wind creeps into the sweater's sleeves and whirls around your body. Your sweat is cold and it dries. Louder voices: "All is safe"; your eyes are searching for the owner of the voice on the roofs, and again: "All is safe." You retrace the path and in front of the father's house you freeze for a while. The door is ajar and a head looking smaller in a white scarf is searching the end of the alley with a lantern. Mom spots you and pulls her scarf to just over her eyes. A smile is lost under your black mustache. When you get to your home, you climb up the stairs deftly. The lantern has lit up the takhtbamhs. You put your hands on your breasts, they are firm. When you look up, Aref is looking at you with wide open eyes. From a height which, to you, is enormous. His mouth is open, and your breasts are fluttering in what remains of

their fervor. Aref reaches for the stocking hat, and there is a noise at door and the father, who says: “Dear Aref, do you have guests? I realized that my daughter is not back. It is dark. She may be scared.”

Your hair flies into air in free locks. Your father says “God forgive us,” and you wish the flood would come, and you, in the water would go and go and go.

*Translated from the Dari by Bezhn Seyamak
edited by nd/*