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# بين السطور

Between the Lines:  
the Writing Experience  
BTL Arabic World 2013



Poetry   Prose   Photos





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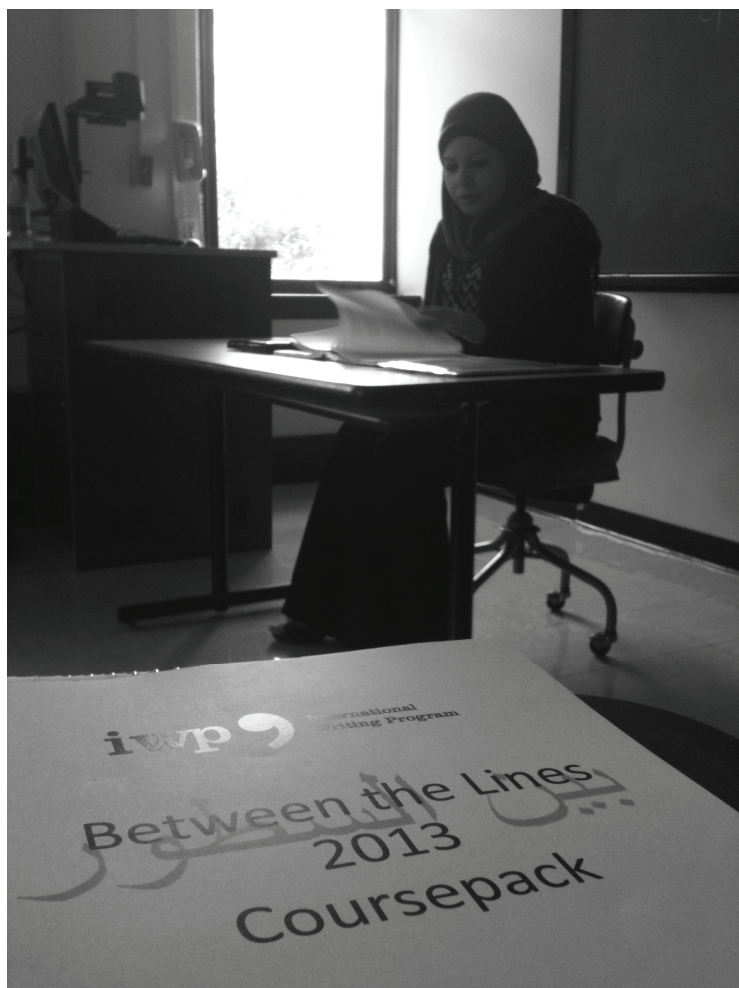
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# بين السطور

## Between the Lines 2013





# **Between the Lines: the Writing Experience**

Poetry, prose, and photos created by  
the participants of Between the Lines  
Arabic World, facilitated by the  
International Writing Program at the  
University of Iowa

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## Foreword

*“I wrote my first novel because I wanted to read it.”*

Toni Morrison

Young, would-be authors are often advised to “write what you know” as a way to ground their work in the details of reality instead of depending on abstract clichés. However, “writing what you know” can feel limiting in a world where an email sent from the USA can be opened and read in Morocco 30 seconds later. Other countries and cultures feel tantalizingly close, and yet, what do we really know about the everyday details of another person’s life across the globe?

Between the Lines: The Writing Experience provides a link between the global and the personal. Sponsored by the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs at the US State Department and coordinated through the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, BTL Arabic World brings young Middle Eastern and North African writers together with US peers to foster cultural exchange through the craft of writing. The great literary traditions of all of these regions meet and mingle as participants live together, write together and learn together in seminars and workshops. For two weeks, 24 students from 10 different Arabic-speaking countries and 7 US states glimpsed the realities of each other’s lives. The IWP hopes that after Between the Lines 2013 is finished, the phrase ‘write what you know’ will be infinitely expanded for our participants, and that their experience will be a gift to their readers as well.





MAGGIE SULLIVAN  
YORK, PENNSYLVANIA



## Neptune Fixed Overhead

I know what you want to talk about; go ahead and sit.

My sister's death, it seems, belongs to everyone -- both the people who knew her and the people who knew of her, through her work. She is everywhere -- her dark sunken eyes, her wry smile, the streak of white hair on her crown. I have seen the same photograph so many times that I have ceased to recognize it. So it goes with every prominent figure; the rise and fall of her life belongs to the opinions of the masses which in life she always disdained.

I could tell you many things. I could tell you about the time she had bubble gum tangled in that famous sweep of black hair, and I had to cut it out with a pair of safety scissors. I could tell you how she went to the movies with our stepfather and then cried for hours afterward because she couldn't understand how anyone could enjoy that shit, when there was opera in the world. I could tell you about her first boyfriend. I could tell you about her first girlfriend. I could list the books she read to me while Mother slept off the gin: *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Republic*, *Walden Pond*, *The Magic Mountain*.

Yes, wonderful book. *The Magic Mountain* was one of her favorites. She could go on and on about Thomas Mann. I see you've done your research. Wonderful.

But -- listen, I don't want to talk about any of that. Do you want more coffee? Alright.

I remember that she dug a hole in our backyard one day, about five feet by eight feet -- deep, that is -- and she lay down in it. Mother found her hours later, one hand tucked under her head, reading Emmanuel Kant to an audience of spiny lizards. It was the one place where she could read in shade and quiet. She hated being in the house, between Fred and Mother. Sometimes she let me read with her. There were little shelves dug into the side of the pit, actually, so we each had our own bookshelves.

Hang on, that's the dog.

Anyway, and -- this is something you'll want to hear, I think -- I remember once she fell asleep out there. Everyone forgot to tell her to come in, I suppose. It really changed her in some way -- she'd talk about it, when we talked on the phone about our childhood etcetera -- and I've always wondered why. Maybe the abandonment led to a realization of some kind. But she didn't seem unhappy when she mentioned that night. She said it made her become who she was. There's a Nietzsche quote almost like that, actually. You are the person you will become. Something like that.

But who was that person? To me, she was my sister. To you, she was a writer. That was what she always dreamed of being -- the essays and political goings-on were almost side projects to her. I know they don't seem like it now. She always felt lousy about that. That the novels didn't come off as well as

she wanted, and it was the essays that got all the attention. That they loved her for her mind, not her soul or her psyche or whatever it is that makes writing happen.

She wanted me to be a writer, too. Rebecca, she'd say, you've got the knack for it. And she knew I loved to read as well. Did you know that by the end of her life, by the end of her life she had over 20,000 books?

I never wanted to be a writer. I resent her now, for making me seem like one -- for making me tell this story to you, with your notebook, your wide-open earnestness, your adoration for anyone who has ever seen or touched the same page as my sister, who was sometimes cruel to me and to the other people she loved. Which were few. Did you know that she died on the same date that Galileo discovered Neptune? He thought it was a fixed star, instead of a planet. There is no such thing as a discovery without a mistake.

I never wanted to be a writer because my sister, who was a writer, could sleep outdoors in a grave with nothing but Thomas Mann. She had trained herself not to need anything else. It was all there, in her head, and the rest of us were just incidental, orbital features. That's a sad way to live.

Of course, all of this is just my opinion. You might not want that in your article.

But what happened that night, it sealed something in her. I knew then, when I ran outside and woke her up, when she wiped the desert dew from the covers of her books, when she followed me inside and closed the door, I knew. I imagine this was the night she saw Neptune, swinging overhead, telling her how she would die. Julia cradling her shaved white head. Anthony weeping. Our pain is solitary and only ours. But for you -- you lucky fools -- she decided, that night, to live forever.







SALMA BENOMARA  
MEKNES, MOROCCO



## (رسالة الى الرب)

عزيزي الرب،

أجلس فوق كرسيّ الهزاز و يداي ملتفتان حول أرجلي ، و قلبي ينسخ كل هذا الكم الهائل من الأفكار فوق الورق. أفكار انبثقت فجأة و انعكست في الغرفة من حائط إلى آخر و كأنها صدى ضائع بين الجبال يبحث عن مكانٍ ليرتاح فيه. أرسل كلماتي هذه إليك و كلي أملٌ في أن تكون صاحبةً بما يكفي حتى تخترق الغيوم الكثيفة و تنزل فوق المطر لتصل و لو حتى كلمةً واحدة .. كلمةً (إغاثة) !

خليا دماغي تبدو كزرناناتٍ و أنا السجين، أسجنٌ ليس مرةً فقط بل ملايين المرات، تارةً في زنازةٍ الخوف و تارةً في زنازةٍ القلق. في يومٍ أنا حبّيس الخيانة و في الغد تائه في الأكاذيب و المراوغات. كم هي كثرةُ الكلمات التي أود أن أسمعك إياها! عذرنِي يا إلهي إن إستهنت بقدرتك على قراءة أئين الجائع وخشخشة النمل و لكني نفسُ كنفوس كل البشر طماعاً و شكاكة. أريد من صوتي أن يهدم الجبال العاتية و أن يذيب الحديد حتى أستطيع أن أرتاح. أريد من كلماتي أن تُسمع لكن أخاف أن يمر الدهر و يأخذ معه كلما أملكه و أنا الذي لطالما كنت حامدةً و شاكرةً. لكن ليس هناك أشنع من أن تحمل ثقلًا بداخلك و لا تحرره.

اريد ان أحذثك عن الحرب فهل تكون لي إننا مستمعة؟ أناس تقتل و أناس تعيش، فبأي حق يفرز السعيد عن التعتيس؟ أناس تنتفس عبق النرجس و اخرى تضيق في المحرقات، و أعيني داهشةً كيف ان القمع ينخر العالم و الكل يتحدث باسم الحريات! و ان تحكم العالم اصبحت مسالة بسيطة، إجلس على كرسي من اللؤلؤ و تكلم و عودك الخداعة. مقابلات و مؤتمرات صحفية مع شخص من المفروض ان يمثل الشعب امام الغير، لكن في الحقيقة ما ممثل الا لكبريائه و تعاليه أمام الشعب، و امام الغير.

اريد ان أحذثك عن النفاق الذي يعيش في الناس فهل تكون درعي الحامي؟ أناس من كثرة تعبدوا للمال اصبحت هي الاخرى قطعة نقدية بوجهين. فإذا ما تبسم لك شخص تعلم انه سيتعيس وراء ظهره، و اذا ما تعبس أمامك تنتظر منه المزيد عندما ترحل. يا له من عالم مجنون اصبحنا فيه نخاف من الابتسامة و نرتاح للعبوس!

أودك أن تحس بصرخاتي تجاه من تسمع أحكامهم الفارغة كطلقات نارية فهل تصدها من اجلي؟ أناس من كثرة عيوبهم انتقلوا الى ذلك الشخص البرئ و المجهول ليكتبوا قصصاً عنه. قصص كلماتها الإشاعات و خطوطها الأكاذيب. فمتى يا ترى ستنتهي شهور الحزن و أعوام الضرب و القمع و التعذيب؟ حتى السماء لم تعد مجانية،

فمتى سيستطيع الكل التحليق كالعندليب؟

لكن يا إلهي، يا خالق الكون و يا راسم هذه اللوحة، فكما رسمتها بالأسود حسنتها بالأبيض، راقبت من بعيد الخير و الشر يمشيان معا فوق الارض. عين ارى بها الحروب و الخداع و النفاق، و عين أرى بها السكون و السلام ممتدة نحو الآفاق.

أرى عظم ترك و رحمك في الفصول. في الصيف بدفته و إبتسامته الصفراء، في الربيع و عيناه الخضراوان. أرى عبقريتك في عواصف الشتاء، و في أوراق الخريف الضائعة.

أرقب حنانك و عطفك في كل ضحكة على وجه البريء، و أمل كل شخص يرى في الكوب النصف المليء. أرى حبك في كل يد إمتدت للمساعدة، حتى و لو كانت مليئة بالغبار، حتى و لو كانت دامية.

إلهي، فكما لا يوجد اليمين بدون الشمال، و كما لا تكتمل الطبيعة بدون تلال، لابد من الكفاح، لابد من الصعود و السقوط حتى نصل أعالي الجبال.

إلهي، كن بجانبنا حينما نسقط، إحتضنا عندما نخاف هنا و الآن، إجعلنا نصره الحق و غلبة الباطل قبل فوات الأوان.

## **A walk through autumn:**

It all started with the first brown leaf falling to the ground!

She goes out for a walk, a long tiring walk in places she's never seen before. The trees were pale and sick, the sky was red yet still blue, the wind caresses her as it rattles and storms its last breath as she wonders, in this scenery of death, if it's the end of a day or a lifetime!

Thoughts racing fast through her mind, her memories flash in her eyes, and they split like a trail of blood on her white soft cheeks that once held tears, tears that are now getting dried!

She thinks about "life" that deceived her and sold her to death which pushed her away too, leaving her trapped in a red margin in between.

She thinks about "hope" that never was more than an echo as she wishes if she could only feel an ounce of it, just for a second, to know what it's like to be alive, hopeful and not afraid of tomorrow!

Fear! Fear of loneliness, of the unknown. Fear for no reason, fear for all the reasons! A cruel emotion that shows no mercy towards her heart. Anxiety that freezes her chest like crystals of snow in the coldest night of winter.

She feels cold, so cold. She inhales the wind and exhales storms full of mixed, dark emotions. Fear, pain, misery, like the gruesome lines of a gothic poem written in the corners where every word, every sensation reincarnate and haunt her like a moth to the flame as she shines like an ember about to die and turn into dust and smoke that fades in the breeze, like a lost autumn leaf, looking to disappear !





CHRIS CAMACHO  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS



## Fear of Planes

I don't know how I got here, or why I am here anymore. I joined the Army to fight for my country. Now I just feel like we are looking for fights just because we are the superior power. This isn't what I signed up for. All I know is that this is war and I'm here in a plane with my brothers in arms about to go to battle with people we don't want to fight. With people we'd rather go out and drink with. It doesn't matter because I am here.

I never liked riding in planes. Maybe it's the reason that our plane is always hit before getting to the drop zone. I was always amazed at how I was able to get out of a burning plane. Now every time I ride I always get paranoid I am not going to make it. I always feel I will die in one of these missions that require flying. Like I wasn't going to make it to the ground and will die in the sky.

I believe being a pilot takes great courage and skill. During the ride I constantly looked around at my brothers, always noticing some sweating like crazy others eager to get to battle. Why would anyone be excited to fight in a war? Why? I noticed myself sweating— it's my fear of planes acting up. All I hoped for was to make it to land, and then I would be satisfied with dying— but I rather stay alive. I just really don't want to die in a plane. The whole plane ride was quiet no one making a single sound or movement. Then the pilots yelled 15 minutes till drop zone. The soldiers who were excited were now scared to go to battle. I noticed their fear in their eyes. Looking around the room constantly, mumbling, and sweating intensively. Then my brothers began asking me question and yelling over each other.

I been so focused on my fears I had forgotten I was the captain of this company. I should be taking care of them and making sure they have no fear. How can I take away their fear if I had my own fear? It doesn't matter. I was given the responsibility to be a leader and I need to show it.

I yelled *SHUT UP!!! Everything is going to be ok. I will be here to protect you all, and I am here to put my life on the line for you.* Everyone began cheering and agreeing then everyone began fist pumping, and shaking hands agreeing they would put their lives for one another. We then yelled **WE ARE ALL BROTHERS IN ARMS!!!!!!!!!!** Then Boom, Boom, Boom. Anti-Aircraft guns began shooting at us. As I looked outside the window I saw the plane next to ours blow up in half. I began sweating even more.

Everyone began panicking saying we should jump out already saying we were not going to make it. I had not done this in a while, but I had nothing to lose. I began praying in Spanish but once I was done I realized again why I'm reacting like this I should begin acting more like a leader. I was scared out of my mind and so was everyone else. Again I had to take care and take my fear and their fear away in order to guide everyone on staying alive in war. I remember the calm classroom I would sit in during high school. I closed my eyes and took deep breaths in and out. Then Boom our left wing was hit we began losing alti-

tude. I then took action and told everyone to remain calm and ready up their equipment and be ready for when the pilots open the hatchet to jump out.

I got up to speak with the pilots. I told them to let us out before we got shot. They said they were going to try to get us as close as possible to our dropping zone. We were still 5 min away by plane. Walking would take us about 10 hours to get to the drop zone. The pilots then began arguing. *No let them out let them out this is as close as we can get them. No we can get them closer.* I went back to sit down and trust in the pilots and wait. Five minutes later the hatch opened, but the Anti- Aircraft were still shooting. The whole island we were invading was filled with them. I was about to say *go go go*, but then our plane was hit again. It was still flying steady.

Most of us were shaken from the blast. I noticed I was on the floor everything was shaking my mind was blank my vision blurry. As I looked around I could make out figures. I remembered the hatch was open. I noticed some soldiers jumping out of the plane and others still on the ground or still strapped into their seats. I quickly got to my feet, shook my head and focused my sight. Just when two soldiers were sprinting to jump out I grabbed them by their back packs and pulled them back. I shouted at them what the heck they were doing leaving the rest of the men behind and to help me get them out. We quickly helped the remaining soldiers get out. I was surprised the plane was still flying. I took a look outside and noticed the whole right wing was on fire. It wasn't going to hold for long— I had to get the pilots out.

The two soldiers that I had stopped from jumping, Miller and Woods, now stopped me from heading to the back and kept shouting *get off now the plane was not going to hold for long.* I shouted back *hell no way I was going to leave the pilots I could save them no one gets left behind.* Miller and Woods kept pulling me out. They told me they were pilots this was their job they sign up for these missions. They knew what the risk was and would give their lives for us just to get to out locations. We were right on the edge of the hatch, and I couldn't hear anything else except for wind dashing through. I didn't know why I was still resisting even though I knew Miller and Woods were right about leaving the pilots. Then Boom.

As I looked at the door where the pilots room was I saw flames burst from that room and gush out straight at me. I let go and Miller and Woods pushed me out of the plane. I quickly grabbed them by the shoulders and I pulled them with me— the flames barely touched their back packs. As I swarmed through the air and looked back up where our plane was flying, now just a burst of flames and newly-made scrap metal flying everywhere. I thought to myself *I could have saved them, but I didn't.* They risked their lives for us to reach our destination. I turned around and look back up. Miller and Woods were behind me. Now it was my turn to risk my life. it was my job to make sure my company made it back home.





SHAHD AL-KAF  
RIDADH, SAUDI ARABIA



لا أنسى يا صديق رسائلك التي كانت تأتيني بلا مناسبات، خالية من التحايا، أو السؤال عن الحال .. مليئة بالأفكار التي تموج في رأسك .. تأخذك كالمسكة من شاطئ إلى آخر، ومن ماء عذب إلى ملح .. رسائلك كانت تشرح من أنت بشكل مفصل جداً، تجعلك كالكتاب المفتوح حتى إن كان الذي قرأها شخص لم يعرفك يوماً ..  
أقارن الآن بين حالنا آنذاك وحالنا الآن، كيف تقرأ رسالتي هذه بمجرد ضغطة زر وقبل بضع وعشرين سنة كنت أقبض أطرافي وأشد على قلبي حتى لا تخرج روحي من صعوبة الانتظار .. الانتظار الذي لا يعرفه أبناؤنا .. والشحن الذي تتركه صناديق البريد، كنا نفع في خب صناديق البريد، نفع في خب كل شيء قاير على إحياء علاقاتنا ..

أقف على أطلال الحياة التي جمعتنا ولم تلق لاختلافاتنا بالا .. كل حواسي منشغلة بك، تتعاون لتحتك هنا بجاني قريباً مني، ترسمك حقيقةً جداً .. حقيقةً أكثر مني ربماً !  
أعود إلى المنزل ككل ليلة بخطوات مثقلة بالذكرى، أفتح حقيبة السفر القديمة، وأقرأ - كما أفعل دائماً - ثم بقايا الأحداث في ذاكرتي أرقع الرسائل ولا يعينني هذا على قلبي ..

(١)

في أحد ليالي الأيام الخالية، مساء يوم الاثنين أول أيام الأسبوع في هذه الدولة التبعيئة جالساً في حديقة الجامعة متكناً على شجرة عظيمة، رغم خضارها أحس أنها تشاركني التعاسة والبؤس والنقمة على هذا المكان .. تجربني هذه الجامعة السخيفة على حمل حقيبة مستطيلة غريبة الشكل أضع فيها كتيبي وأغراضي وتعطيني شعوراً أنني أبوء كفتاة صغيرة ترتدي كعباً عالياً، لا أعلم لم لكن هذا يحدث .. ويزعجني جداً .. ثم تعطيني شعوراً أكبر بالغربة عندما أشارك شعوري هذا الآخرين فأرى في وجوههم الاستغراب ثم يقولون أنهم يرون هذه الحقايب جيدة جداً .. أكاد أستعرق من كل هذه التفاهة التي تتكلم في مدينة واحدة !

أدخلت يدي أبحت بين الأكوام عن الدفتر ذو الأوراق العريضة المزخرفة لأكتب لك، لاحظت أنه قلماً تصلني رسالة منك لا تتكلم فيها عن زخرفات هذا الدفتر، موضوع آخر سعيد يعينك على السخرية مني والشعور بالرضا عن نفسك - بأساً، كم أشتاق لك !!- كنت أستطيع وقتها وأنا أتأمل أطراف الورق وأتذكر حينما كنا سوياً في المكتبة نشترى هذا الدفتر كيف ضحكت وسخرت من ذوقي، استطعت أن أتنبأ بالطرفة التي ستكتبها في رسالتك القادمة وقد كنت محقاً بعض الشيء فقد استهزأت بي في ردك حينما كتبت

[أه حبيبي، كم اعتدت على هذه الزخرفات الجميلة في دفترك، قد نقشت في قلبي وتشكلت عروقي بشكلها]  
قرأت كلامك وأنا أتخيلك بظفرتين وشنب، تمرقت أمعاني لفرط الضحك .. واستمر الحال وأنا أكمل المکتوب ... ] يا إلهي متى ينتهي هذا الدفتر الفحيح، أم أنك تأتي للمدينة لتشتري منه كميات كبيرة تقهرني بها وتشعرنني أنني أصادق فتاة صغيرة ! إن الذي يجعلك تبدو كفتاة ترتدي كعباً عالياً هو هذا الدفتر ذا القلوب لا الحقيقة المدورة، المشكلة أنه قبيح جداً حقاً أقول لك : هذه الزخرفات تلوث بصري !! ]

وأذكر جيداً أنني قرأت ردك على رسالتي تحت هذه الشجرة في نفس المكان لكن في وقت آخر .. وضحكت، ضحكت من قلبي يا صديقي .. ضحكت ممسكاً رسالتك بيمينى وحقيبتى بيساري، وكلما قرأت سطراً اشتد الضحك .. واشتدت قبضتي .. لكنني لم أخبرك يوماً أنني بكيت بقدر ما ضحكت واحتضنت الحقيقة المستطيلة، التي تراها في خيالك دائرية وبكيت طوال مدة جلوسي وحينما ركبنا الحافلة .. كنت أبكي في الطريق دون خجل .. هذه حسنة المدينة الوحيدة، أن الناس لا يكثرثون لبكاء الرجال .. لكنني وصلت لشقتي وأنت تعرف أن زملائي فيها عرب .. فشددت قبضتي على الحقيقة وأخفيت آثار البكاء .. وعدت منافقاً عربياً ممنوعاً من التعبير !

(٢)

في يوم من الأيام بعد عودتي من صلاة الجمعة، شعرت كأنني أحتق بجل كاية يشد على عنقي وأنا أقف على أرض الوطن التي تبتعد تدريجياً فيزداد إحكام الحبل على حلقي، متلازمة الغربة تهجم بقوة أكبر كلما طننت أنني شفيت منها .. لبت الأمر توقف عند هذه المشاعر، كنت ضائماً جداً في تلك الفترة، كلما حضر وقت الصلاة انتبهت ولكني أسوف وأوجل متمعداً، لا تمر دقيقة إلا والصلاة حاضرة في ذهني، لكنني لم أكن أصلي حتى يقارب وقت الصلاة على الانتهاء، حاولت الوصول لشيء ما عبر عصياني هذا، لا أعرف ما الذي كنت أريده تحديداً، لكني بقيت أدعو رغم عصياني، أدعو الله كثيراً أن يعطيني اليقين .. والبصيرة !

في ذلك اليوم، وبعد خطبة الجمعة التي فجرتها كالبركان الذي خدم مدة طويلة حتى جمع نار الأرض كلها وفجرها مرة واحدة .. بعثت بهذه الرسالة إليك :

[ كفى .. كفى .. أخبرهم أن يكفوا عنا هذا التزييف، أخبرهم أن يتوقفوا عن إخباري بقصص التوبة التي تأتي فجأة وتغير حياة الشخص تماماً فيتحول من العاصي الزاني السكر إلى الداعية الواعظ الناصح، أخبرهم أنهم قتلوا فينا

يأتِه جبريل فجأةً وغير حياته إلى نبي في ثانية .. هذا حدث صحيح، لكن ما الذي حصل قبل هذا؟ لماذا لا يقفون عند اختلاله عشر سنين في الغار؟ ويخبروننا أن السر والحقيقة هي في البحث بطريقتك الخاصة، بجميع المقومات التي تملكها، وهذا ما امتلكه محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم : عقله، السماوات والأرض بما فيهن، وغار؛ مكان صغير يختبئ فيه ليستطيع تشغيل عقله بأمان ويدرس مافي السماوات والأرض .. وعندما وصل إلى حقيقة غائبة عنه .. جاء جبريل ليخبره بباقي القصة ]  
جاء رَدَّك لي كتربيته أخ حنون : [ عندما نلتقي أخيرني بهذا، أنا لا أملك لا عقلا ولا سماء ولا غارا بدونك يا صديقي ..

ملاحظة : أرجوك صل في مسجد آخر الجمعة القادمة]

(٣)

حدثُ أني بكيت في إحدى ليالي سبتمبر بحرقّة المشتاق الذي لا يعرف كيف تبرّد أشواقه، بكيت بجزع لأنني ظننت أني بعد كل سنوات الغربة هذه سأعتاد الوحدة وسأصنع حياة أخرى سلسلة جدًا خالية من النظر اليومي لصور قديمة، والجلوس وسط كومة جرائد تتكلم عن منطقة صغيرة لا أحد يعرف عنها شيئاً، ولا أحد من هؤلاء الذي يرون حالي يتردى كل يوم يعرفون أنها سبب المأساة التي أعيشها.. كنتُ في بداية المشوار متمسكاً بخيط أمل أن الحال سيتغير، وبقيت ألوم نفسي فترات طويلة أنني أتصرّف كطفل وأن تخطي أشواقي وحزني لأهلي سهل لكني أمتنع عنه بكثرة تفكيري .. لكن في تلك الليلة كان شيء أشبه باليقين مسّ قلبي؛ أن الحب واحد، والعشق واحد، أن الأم هي القلب الحقيقي لا هذا الذي ينبض بين أضلعك، أن الإخوة هم أوردتك وشرابيك التي تضخ فيك الحياة، وأنتك يا صديقي مَخ الأمر وليّه !  
لذا لم أستطع التوقف عن البكاء، أيقنت أني ساعاتي هذا الحنين لسننتين قادمة، وحمدت الله على هذا الحنين !







LILY KAIRIS  
WILMINGTON, DELAWARE



## Cat's Cradle

She says it's because the wires in your brain are tangled.  
criss-crossed, one over the other and around and back;  
left over right, right over left.

twisted in knots like those games  
you tried to teach me when I was small,  
barely five feet tall and haughtily proud of it,  
with that rainbow string tied around my hair,  
with those scars above my eyebrows  
from when you'd tried to show me  
how to climb like tarzan from that rich family's  
treehouse to the honeysuckle ground.

I've never believed the story about your wires, no –  
I couldn't believe it, not when you lived like that,  
    barefoot on the scorching mid-August gravel,  
    singing opera on the streets of downtown Wilmington,  
    creating stories about the planes outside your tiny oval window:  
    how one was the overbearing father,  
    leather briefcase and oil-slick hair and  
    lapels with his initials sewn on in golden thread.

Your wires are perfectly fine, thank you very much.  
one over the other and around and back,  
left over left, right over right.

So fine that you'll show up unannounced at the back door at 9 pm,  
    rapping at it with two knuckles, impatient, expectant  
    your eyes flitting like hummingbirds between the landscapes in your  
mind

So fine that you can't listen to anything but classical music  
    without throwing a tantrum or trying to jump out of a moving car  
    or googling local orphanages like you know what you're doing

You don't know, but it's fine.  
Really. It's fine.

The woman with the shoulder-cropped hair  
and the warm voice that curves around words  
with baby steps like she's got to be careful,  
like she can look but not touch, never touch,  
she says you've got your wires tangled.  
(Fire alarm, screaming child, white noise between stations on the radio dial.)  
she says "that must be hard."  
--- but it isn't, really, and it shouldn't be.

(It's funny, because sometimes I want to press words  
onto your pulse points with my thumbs,  
so you're marked with them, so you remember.  
remember to wash your hair and say "excuse me";  
remember that I'm your little sister, okay,  
I'm not supposed to carry this much.

I want to tuck these words in the curves of your elbows  
and the back of your neck and the tips of your eyelashes,  
so I see nothing but them, the letters and the lines,  
not the broken bones, the jigsaw edges, the memories.

--- but it shouldn't be this hard.)

not when you make up stories about the dragon-boy  
in Spirited Away and teach me how to say colors  
in Swahili and dance across our wooden kitchen floors  
with your arms spread wide,  
fighter pilot on the training mission,  
little boy with the spider-man shirt  
flying a kite across the canvas of the Rehoboth sky.

it shouldn't be hard when you live like that.  
and when I tell the warm-voiced woman,  
with her warm-dusted hair and her warm-worn smile,  
I remember how you looked on that day in October,  
ripping down the bead curtain in my room,  
stringing words together with closed fists  
like you knew what you were doing.  
maybe you don't.

but when the warm-voiced woman tells me such  
challenges me, soft and careful,  
I go firecracker-hearted, iron-tongued  
thinking of dragons and fighter pilots and the mid-

august sun

until it all twists and twists into cat's cradle  
one over the other and around and back,  
left over right, right over....





AHMED ALI  
DURAZ, BAHRAIN



## **This Poem Will Never End**

This poem will never end,  
It will exceed the capacity of a kiss,  
It will dance on the lips of those who whisper to the sea,  
It will sway around the eyelids of those who gaze at the stars,  
It will contain itself inside the heart's left ventricle,  
It will swirl around the bones of your spine.

This poem will never end,  
It will print foot prints on the face of the clouds,  
It will drop with rain as it whips away the sins on the pavements,  
It will dissolve with the tears as they swim in the heart of the ocean,  
It will ignite the stars when the sun places a kiss upon the moon's brow,  
It will pierce the sky ouroboros.

This poem will never end,  
It will revolve around the curves of your finger tips,  
It will steal spades from the older farmer's house,  
It will purify the depth of your soul.

This poem will never end,  
your poem will never,  
It will tear apart your flesh,  
And leave a sweet memory upon my cheekbones.

This poem will never end,  
But I,  
Will.

## تمزيق بقلم احمد خليل.

احفر حروفاً ممزقة  
حروفٌ مزقتها عقارب التراب  
و كسرتها امواج النهر

أكتب قصيدةً مكدسة بالجروح  
قصيدةً بكت عليها دموع لاذعة  
دموع اذابت طريقها لتكون بحرًا دموي

اكتب رسالة على صفحات صفراء  
سال الحبر الاسود الثقيل منها  
فسيلان الحبر ملأ تجاويف الصفحة

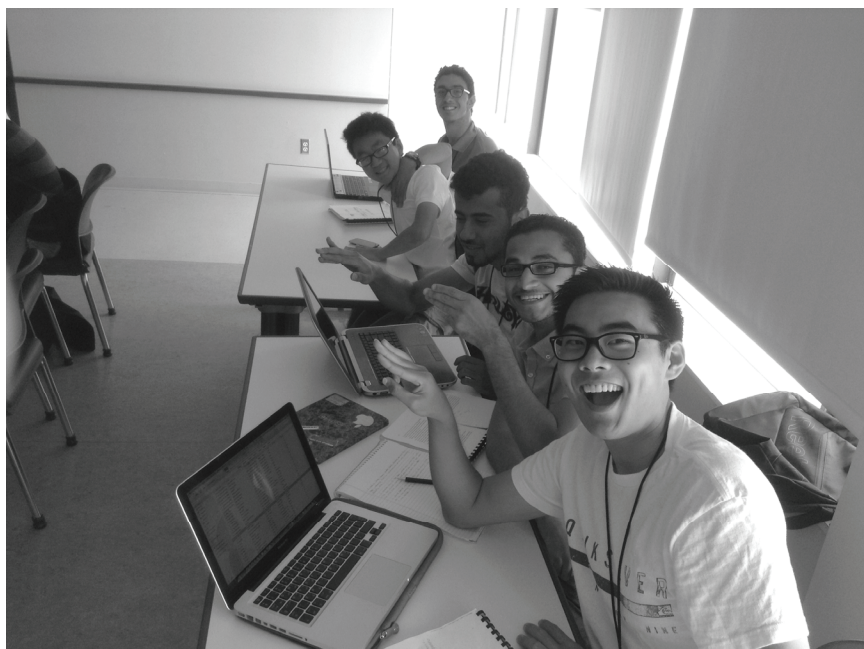
رسالتي اسودت من حروفي المهشمة  
و حبري الاسود الثقيل

احرقت قصائدي  
و افترس اللهب رسائلي المحطمة  
و ابقت النيران حروفي في حلقتها المشتعل

فنزفت قصائدي،  
و ذابت رسائلي،  
و تلاشت حروفي

و نزع الحبر الاسود  
و انا شربت  
شربت حبر كلماتي الممزقة  
فتقيأت احشائي دماً و كلمات و قصائد و رسائل

شربت حبر كلماتي الممزقة  
فكلماتي  
مزقتي.







ZORA HURST  
IOWA CITY, IA



## one last thing

words usually fall out of me like overripe apples from a rickety basket swung by careless hands,

but not today.

i have no idea what to say.

time is what they were really talking about at water-safety orientations years ago  
at the lake:

don't fight it.

like they would against any strong current, your arms

and legs

and lungs

and heart will sputter and die before making even the faintest bit of

headway.

time is cold, and bends for none.

if i could change anything, i wouldn't.

my heart leapt for yours back when your grey-green eyes were mostly green -  
before that hard winter where we'd listen to the deafening silence of heavy snow  
and heavier blankets.

(your toes were always freezing;

your mouth almost too soft)

it's beginning to fade, my recollection of your voice:

the persistent vulnerability in the way you swallowed your words with  
capsules

of laughter,

the span of your splayed fingers on my arm,

the softsoft sighs you blessed me with - a benediction, a curse.

no one ever looked at me like that.

our mothers were bosom friends, so we were cribmates, sharing shirts and shoes  
and much loved corduroys until you kept growing and i... didn't.

tell me, do you miss wearing my sweatshirts as much as i miss your head-  
bands?

tell me, do you miss wearing my sweatshirts as much as i miss your headbands?  
when i am old and my bones are ringed like the trunks of trees,  
i will wonder if your hair is still curly  
- if it went all-white like your grandmother's, or thinned out like your uncle paul's.

(he was your least favourite of your mother's brothers,

you never forgave him for making your brother cry  
that thanksgiving)

forgiveness takes as long to settle in as it does for me to

Painstakingly  
pluck your hair  
from my blankets

(untangling fine strands from buttons of shirts you loved)

for your oft-worn but expensive earrings to make their way out of my bureau  
drawers and

-off of my coffeetable -

into the trash can you always stubbed your toes on.

"you are like a universe."

the last time we met for coffee,

(your hair dark gold with rain, water sliding down the curves  
of your cheeks - skytears kissing unpicked  
unblemished fruit)

those words perched on the tip of my tongue,

over-eager and under the influence

of your sweetness,

sucked into the vacuum between us, a million calculations,

whirring planets,

distant stars.

(former trees filed down to somewhat conical utensils)

state can change, but nothing is irreversible

what once gave shade now sulks in the back of your closet with mixtapes, lint  
and heartache

time, my no-longer-love, is like the set of antlers i made you from chopsticks

(former trees filed down to somewhat conical utensils)

state can change, but nothing is irreversible

what once gave shade now sulks in the back of your closet with mixtapes, lint and heartache

seven hundred rebirths couldn't have forced life into that spring  
this is an apology, and the opposite of that.

big bang in reverse:

whirling, condensing, shrinking, silence.

in the beginning, i hadn't met you.

but in the end, i didn't need to.



**YASMEEN ATME  
NAHEF, ISRAEL**



لا تكبر !  
 لا تكبر ، لأجلي  
 وابق صغيرا  
 هنا، تحت قناديلي  
 تنبت حبات القمح  
 وفي النور الخافت  
 يموت وطن!  
 دعني أستريح بين راحتك  
 بين كلماتك..  
 بين اثنين وآخر  
 ودعني.. أندمج فيك  
 واتركني، أعاكس وجهة الشمس  
 كي أمتشق ما يكفي مني  
 لأعود!  
 وابق صغيرا  
 يكن من الصعب عليك أن تكفك حلمي  
 وتبعد عني.. نظرة شهيد!  
 هنا قد يكون لي وطن  
 تكس بين صفحات الشتاء  
 بلله مطر  
 وهنا، ربما ضعت أنا  
 عند آخر محطة  
 استيقظت في.. وغاصت في وجه السماء  
 قد أجد مفاتيح الموت، في خوف الليل  
 حين ترقب موعد اللقاء.. بالأم!  
 وأنا على كتفك أضحيت  
 أسيرا.. خدعته اعتراضات  
 تهبط فيه تساؤلات سجان  
 وأنا يا وطني  
 ما زلت إنسان،  
 وما زلت كلماتي لزجة  
 وما زال رأسي صغيرا  
 وراحتك كبيرة  
 وما عدت أحلم..  
 بشعر، بجذيلة طويلة  
 تولد في الغياب!  
 وما أنت جريح.. ولا شهيد..  
 في عينيك الغافيتين  
 يفقر طائر من نهر لآخر،  
 كأن المدى يطول  
 وكان الأفق البعيد، قد اقترب  
 وأنا، لا أحلم بك من قال؟  
 وأنا حتى، لست أنا  
 وأنت في البال، أغنية  
 وفي الحلم ضحية  
 لا توقظني، ولا ترفع يديك  
 لدعاء الحرية،  
 تحت قناديلي،  
 تنبت حبات القمح

وفي النور الخافتِ  
أموث أنا،  
ويجها وطن! وفي النور الخافتِ  
أموث أنا،  
ويجها وطن







NOAH KIM  
SAN MARION, CALIFORNIA



## The Abolitionist

There is an abolitionist sitting at a rutted, wooden desk, a desk far too small for him, a desk so small that he (the abolitionist) is forced to write with both his elbows hanging over the sides. This abolitionist, who is looking drained of flesh with dehydrated lips and a tragic countenance shaded in frustration, is tired. This abolitionist, whose magazine *The Liberator* has “been burned more than any other periodical in existence today” according to the Virginia Gazette, this slightly unwell man, this abolitionist whose writings have directly inspired no less than three separate slave rebellions (each of which resulted in no small amount of deaths), scratches his almost bald head with nails that he hasn’t cut in over two months, ragged nails that make red fault lines across his watery skin as he scratches, and sits back in his chair, imbibing tepid water as he does so, his eyes half shut. This abolitionist, this feeble, girlish virgin, whose eccentricities have sparked more than a little speculative rumor, this tired yet still zealous man “more despised than any other firebrand in existence today” according to the Virginia Gazette, sits back and removes his spectacles and polishes them on his right shirt sleeve. This “not right” abolitionist, whose numerous eccentricities include both eating potatoes and only potatoes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and lighting fires, roaring fires, in his home during the hottest days of the year for the supposed purpose of “showing the Devil that his fire is not the hottest,” closes—or perhaps more accurately just briefly rests—his bespectacled eyes, dragging a heavy pen over the parchment before him as he does so, making insignificant doodles and curlicues with the very same pen that has sparked riots and rebellions and assassination attempts, the very same pen that has quote-unquote brought a nation to its knees. The abolitionist, whose scholarly face, slightly burnt from prior overexposure to heat, seems more like that of a librarian or a sort of mild-mannered sales clerk, who weighs less than 100 lbs., tilts his head slightly to the left and breathes out fiercely, breathes out in an exhausted yet vehement “huhhhh” that startles the dog, a brown and white cocker spaniel, curled up in a ball on his (the abolitionist’s) carpet awake. This pale, eccentric, thin, ridiculously unhealthy abolitionist, whose skin looks watery primarily because of a severe underexposure to protein (and overexposure to starch), who has ticked off tens of thousands of rich and powerful men, this deeply compassionate (yet obviously rather touched) man raised by his loving mother on scraps deemed unfit for the hunting dogs that those very same rich men held in such high regard, opens his eyes once more, takes a solitary potato slice from the plate to his right, places it (the potato slice) tentatively into his mouth, and continues to write, chewing softly as he does so.

This radically empathetic contrarian, acclaimed by an ever-decreasing number of like-minded men, all of whom he (the abolitionist) despises and frequently labels “weak” or “apologist,” men that he tries purposely to enrage, has never wanted any companions, any friends. This abolitionist, whose consistent and unrelenting criticism of both friend and foe forces neutrals to become apologists, apologists to become radicals, and radicals to become martyrs, who has been described on six distinct occasions by the Virginia Gazette as the “angriest half-breed in America,” shifts his weight to the right and then rubs his shoulder,

which is feeling hot, feverish, and sore, like a piece of hot iron placed against rather than a part of his body. This abolitionist, whose very most famous article caused vicious riots nationwide, riots during which scores of men (both black and white) beat one another into bloody pieces of meat. Whose very most famous article featured his very most oft quoted line. This abolitionist, whose very most oft quoted line made it absolutely clear that he was in earnest, that he would not equivocate, that he would not excuse, that he would not retreat a single inch, and that he would be heard, whose very most oft quoted line was, essentially, an oath, a sort of vow that he (the abolitionist) would not cease to continue writing lines that would themselves be likewise oft quoted.

This tough, tough half-breed, this abolitionist, who has survived no less than three separate assassination attempts, who has been dragged by violent and feral men through Philadelphia no less than three discrete times at the end of a rope. This abolitionist, who has ten times more enemies than he has friends, who can “make his way about the country solely by the light of his burning effigies,” has watched and suffered and bled more than any other for a cause that does not directly affect him in any way, shape, or form. This abolitionist, who was, only two years ago, kidnapped by three bearded rednecks while traveling through the hills of Virginia and tortured, brutally, who is missing four fingernails on his left hand because of their having been torn off by the rednecks, this abolitionist, who has been stabbed thrice in total (twice in the abdomen and once in the chest), is still alive.

And so, he looks out into the dark, out over the ocean, the abolitionist, towards Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill and Pennsylvania and Philadelphia and sees the American flag being raised high. And sees the ocean rise up and fade out. And then eats another potato slice and wipes his mouth again and closes his eyes again and dreams and imagines himself floating high up above the clouds, born aloft by winged brown and white cocker spaniels, and sees the dank yet seamless sea spread out proudly beneath him, crisscrossed by dark-colored whales that tell him that all will be well as they draw their vast and loving figures closer to the quiet and distant shore. And smiles, fiercely.





YUSRA ARAFEH  
AMMAN, JORDAN



### (إعتراف شاعرة متأخر)

لديّ إعترافٌ يا قدسُ لكِ  
لستُ أكتبُ عنكِ لأجلِ القبةِ  
و ليسَ لأنَ الشمسِ العربيةَ لا تدعي النبوةَ سوى فوقكِ  
بل لأننا نشبهه بعضنا بعضاً  
أو لأنني أشبهكِ  
كلانا نعرفُ كيف تُقضى الأعيادُ بلا العائلةِ  
كلانا مختلفاتٌ في صناديقِ الملحمةِ  
كلانا من أصلي عرقي  
كلانا لا نتحدثُ بغاوةِ العربيةِ  
و كلانا ندوئُ الحبِّ في قصيدةٍ أو بعضِ قصيدةٍ  
كلانا نجلسُ الليلَ ظاغيةً على أنفسنا  
و كأنَ الشهرَ لو مرَّ دونَ حزننا هو شهرٌ مرَّ بلا فاذدةٍ  
كلانا نحُبُّ شاعراً على خيلِ الكلماتِ مرتعشُ الأيادي  
و كلانل نحتاجُ من يمسحُ دمعنا  
و كلانا لا ينادي  
أكتبُ في قضيةٍ جمعتنا  
في أيامِ هجرتنا  
وسطِ الأعادي  
بنصفِ حقيقةٍ .. نصفِ تاريخٍ  
أُخفيهما تحتَ عنادي

### (في الشعر)

الشعرُ ليس خاتماً يلتفُ حول الألوانِ  
ليس جاريةً تجلسُ بجانبِ عرشِ السلطانِ  
ليس مفردةً مبتدلةً تعودُ عليها اللسانِ  
الشعرُ روحٌ و حمى القمرِ و شعورٌ يفوقُ الجنانِ  
الشعرُ لولادةٍ عليّ لولا زمنُ الإطمئنانِ  
الشعرُ لولادةٍ بين عينيّ لما أدركتُ جمالَ المكانِ  
لولا الشعرُ يعرّشُ بين أطرافِ  
لكنك مثلكم .. مجردةٌ إنسان



## CAITLIN PLATHE ATLON, IOWA



## **Cherished Dust**

The city I live in isn't the most attractive city in the world, but there's always been something about it that I absolutely adore. I'm not really sure how to explain it. The city is old and new at the same time, bright and dull, small and big. It's calming somehow, to know that the place I live is just as different and changing as I am. Every single day of my life, there's something about me that changes, at least a little. My teeth get a little whiter. I get into a fight with one of my parents and suddenly I don't feel like a little kid anymore. I think about my future and suddenly I'm terrified.

There is, though, one place. There's one place that I am completely and utterly in love with. On the corner of 5th Avenue and Main Street, there is an run-down, neglected motel that sits quietly as the rest of the city grows. When I was younger, my friends and I would all walk past the building and wonder what was beneath the walls of that motel.

The police weren't too keen on trespassing, but the old motel didn't have locks and no one wanted to pay to put some on. So, we went inside. I remember the first time I walked in there, it was so dusty I sneezed as soon as I crossed the threshold. It was quiet and damp. The front desk had brown dried up papers scattered around it. There was an old rotary dial phone that sat at the edge of the desk. We looked at room after room, secretly hoping to find something, although thinking about it now, I'm not sure what we were really looking for in the first place.

Finally, at the end of the dark hallway, we all had stopped talking. Standing before us was a very large door. We all glanced at each other, suddenly a little nervous to be inside this old motel. I stepped forward, extremely curious. I pushed open the door and there was nothing odd or scary about the room at all.

That door was a library. A plain library who seemed weathered with age. There were cupboards of books, placed erratically around the room. It smelled like dust and the faint scent of damp paper. In the corner of the room sat a blue chair, deep brown oak as its frame. I walked into the room and realized that there was no carpet, only cement with cracks and dirt hidden beneath. There was something about the silence of the room that quietly pleaded to not be broken.

"This place smells so bad," said one of my friends, who had wrinkled her nose.

"Yeah, we should go. It looks like there's mold everywhere."

"Shh," I murmured, hoping for the serene silence to come back.

My friends started to shuffle out of the room, all of them muttering about how stupid it was to come inside this building. "It's so ugly."

I picked up one of the books on the floor. The smell of its pages was like a cheap perfume, easily forgotten, but not to be ignored.



I remember thinking how unbelievable it was that someone how many years before had held the same book in their hands. I started to flip through it and I suddenly didn't want to leave. For the next few years after that first night, I went to that library whenever i had the chance. It was where I read, where I wrote, where I breathed in the scent and lived the life the motel deserved. There was something about that place.

Today, though? I stand in front of that old motel, right as bulldozers and the workers pull up, ready to tear down the beauty that once filled so much life. I sit down on the grass across the street from the motel. So maybe that old library didn't really mean anything to anyone but me. And maybe there really wasn't something special about that room, about those books, that chair. Those old books held something deep beneath those pages and the dirt in those cracks meant more than an old building pleading to be used. This building, this library, was everyone. How people feel sometimes at the end of the day, cracks beneath the skin and dirt and ugliness and unhappiness.

The bulldozer turns on, and I wish I could go back inside one more time, just to smell the old books again.





AKRAM ELNAGDY  
HELIOPOLIS, EGYPT



أمشي متحسباً خطواتي، أنتفس بطريقة عادية، ولكن... أستطيع سماع صوت في عقلي يصيح "انصرف"، أرفض الاستماع وأكتفي بالابتعاد قليلاً عنهم لألقى نظرة من بعيد، يستسلم نصف عقلي المتردد للنصف الفضولي ويبدأ بالدوران حول نفسه بينما تبدأ أصابعي بالتحرك قلقاً كما تتحرك أصابع عازف البيانو.

حقيقة: يعيش أكثر من 7 مليارات شخص على الأرض.

تطرح أسئلة: لماذا نزور المقابر على أي حال؟ أفكر...

أتعبنا من مشاكل الأحياء وطمعنا في سكينه الموتى؟ أنريد التعلم من قصصهم لنحيا أو نموت بطريقة أفضل؟ أنفعل ذلك فقط لأننا نشأنا نشتاق إليهم؟ حتى و إذا كنا لا نعرفهم؟ ببساطة، أنريدهم في عالمنا أم نريد أن نكون في عالمهم؟ هذا ليس بسيطاً!

أتجول في ذلك المكان الرهيب أرى حجراً مكتوب عليه: "18 مايو 1920- 26 يولية 2002"

هل يمكن اختصار حياة أحداً ما في شاهد قبر دون اسمه، وظيفته و أحبائه؟

أغوص في الأرض أو ربما أخلق في السماء، لا أدري بالضبط، كل ما أشعر به هو ان كياني بأكمله في رحلة لمشاهدة حياة كل هؤلاء!

لم ادر ابداً ان المقابر قد تختلف بهذا الشكل من مكان الى آخر، بل من أسرة الى أخرى. بعيداً أرى شاهداً مزخرفاً بالصدف على الطراز الاسلامي العتيق مكتوب عليه آية قرآنية لم أستطع قرائتها بوضوح متبوعة ب "على باشا حسين. 9 مارس 1892- 8 مارس 1980"

أستطيع تخيله، رجل ضخم ذو شارب مخيف يرتدي بذلة واسعة تخفي تحتها كرشاً متدلياً. طربوش فوق رأس أصلع و منشة صنعت من ذيل حصان يمتلكه. بالتأكيد كان أحد الاقطاعيين، مئات من الأفندي ورثها عن أبوه الذي ربما قد قام باجباره على الزواج من إحدى بنات أصدقائه الاستقراطيين. ولكن لا يوجد علامة لزوجته بجانبه، أدفنت دون شاهد؟ أدفنت في مكان آخر؟ أتزوج من الأساس؟ هل مات طبيعياً قبل عيد ميلاده بيوم واحد أم أن شيئاً قد حدث؟

أتترك هذه الأسئلة ورائي و أمشي لأجد شاهداً آخر يبدو أبسط و ربما أحدث، أقترب لأقرأ ما كتب عليه "سهير شفيق. 13 ابريل 1983 – 13 يناير 2013"

ياله من اسم غريب لتلك الفترة، أسميت على اسم إحدى قريباتها؟ تكرار الرقم 13 يخيفني، أرى أمامي فتاة تؤمن بالعلامات، ترتدي سواراً من الخرز يتدلى منه كفت، عين زرقاء حول رقيبتها و حجاباً قد أعطته لها أمها تحفظه في حقيبتها. ربما سكنت في الطابق 13، قد يكون ذلك كافياً لأي شخص أن يخشى من يومه.. توفيت صغيرة، أخبرتها إحدى العرافات بمصير سيئ فأرادت أن تهرب منه و فشلت؟ أو ربما أرادت أن تحققه؟ هل كانت مريضة؟ أم كانت مينة طبيعية؟ ترى كيف شعر أهلها حين فارقتهم؟ و زملائها في العمل؟ و ربما حبيبها؟ أو زوجها؟ قد تكون تزوجت و هي في الجامعة، كيف حال ابنتها الآن؟

تكثر الاقتراحات فتتزعج أنحاء جسدي، لتفرض في النهاية قدمي القرار بالهرب لتتعثر أمام ذلك الشاهد... قريب جداً من الأرض و بسيط بلون عاجي. يذكرني بلون بشرته، نعم جدي، الذي كنت أمشي يومياً معه في الحديقة أسقى له البنفسج فيمنحنى بيت شعر، و أروى له الياسمين فيهديني قصة. تقول جدتي أنى أشبهه تماماً الا في نفحة من جانب أمي (تذكر ذلك باقتضاب). جدي الذي كان صديقي الأول و الأهم. أستطيع أن أتخيل وجهه يبستم

على ذلك الشاهد العاجى، يتطابق اللونان معاً، كما يتطابقاً أيضاً مع لون شاهد قبره الذى اختارته جدتى بينما كانت تسمح دموعها المنسدلة، جدتى التى رفضت العيش فى فيلا جدى الواسعة بعد أن ذبلت جميع أشجارها يوم وفاته. قطعت ملاحظتى لتاريخ الوفاة حبل أفكارى. "31 ديسمبر 2010" نفس تاريخ وفاة جدى، قفزت فكرة أن هذا هو توأم جدى المفقود و أنهما متشابهان فى كل شئ، ابتسمت لثانية ثم فكرت، ما فائدة هذا على أى حال اذا كان الاثنان قد رحلا؟ أزعجنى تذكر انه ليس هنا الآن و أيقنت أن عقلى قد أزداد التفكير فرحلت، فضلت معظم الافكار البقاء فى المقبرة، و لكن رافقتنى الذكريات!

## The Tale of Two Dresses

It's a crazy place in this crazy city where most people are wise enough to suffice with passing by it. Other people prefer to get in and have a closer look at this ancient flea market, for its heritage sometimes or for its bargains most of the time.

In a shady corner of the market stands a middle-aged man hanging a brown cocktail dress with gold floral embellishments and embroideries that looks so antique, he looks at it desperately as he remember that he's been displaying it for more than three weeks now and it's still not sold. The man cannot even remember the number of times he offered it to his customers and got turned down. He tried to find a reason why no one wanted the dress, he couldn't. But the dress had some secrets that would make anyone want to buy it.

As the dress is hanging on this old, rusty wooden display that probably ages more than the man does, you can see clearly the exquisite details in the embroidery and the blend of colors that seem to have faded, just like the memory of the ex-owner of the dress. You'll find the tag if you look closely, signed by the legendary French couturier and the year 1951. As the signature is disappearing shyly in the cream background, a story is about to die...

It started in the winter of 1951, when Princess Fatima of Egypt flew to Paris where she was invited by a dozen designers to attend their fashion shows and

hopefully purchase a design or two. In one cold Parisian night, The Princess arrived to the luxurious hotel wearing a light pink dress designed by the same designer and a fox fur that made her look very feminine. She smiled confidently as if she was the most powerful woman on earth. That night the princess put her eyes on a chocolate brown dress with floral embroidery and swirls and roses embellishments in gold. She ordered it along with many other pieces.

The dress caused a sensation when the princess wore it to a cocktail party. With envy and desire, many of her friends asked to accompany her on her next trip to Paris.

The princess loved the dress, but she never wore it again. One day while checking the magazines, the princess saw Helen Anderson, the famous American actress, wearing the same dress on the cover of LIFE magazine. Angrily, she called the designer and nicely complained that he sold her dress to another one. The designer explained that he does two dresses of each design. They ended up agreeing that Princess Fatima will purchase the two dresses next time. To show his loyalty, the designer sent her highness sketches from his new collection so the princess could choose before anyone else sees the dresses. Fatima appreciated the gesture and ordered several items.

But before the clothes arrived to Egypt the revolution took place and the A few days after her arrival to Napoli the designer sent princess had to leave. her a letter asking her if she liked the dresses, only to find her answering that The designer demanded his payments while the she never received them. princess refused to pay. This would end up a few months later in court with the princess losing to the "King of Couture".

The brown dress was kept in the princess's new villa in Maadi as she wanted to wear it for the first reception she would host there. Only her maid Zainab knew about this villa as Fatima was keeping everything a secret. Less than two weeks into the coup, Zainab went to the villa to see if there was stuff she could get from After all, the princess would prefer her to have them than the soldiers there. that kicked her out of the country!

Zainab remembered the dress when she saw it, and she decided to take it. She She threw a fur coat over it, left the villa wearing the dress under her clothes. too, to make sure that the dress was well kept, took a taxi and went home. Zainab would use this dress to go everywhere she found classy or expensive. She showed off her dress proudly every time, the number of times she bragged about the dress and the antiques she got from there were countless!

Zainab left the dress in the closet as she got too old to wear it. She died two years after her princess, and by her death the house had a new queen. Her only son and his wife Soad lived with her. Soad decided to make everything in the house hers, so she threw out the antiques and sold the dress, along with basically everything else, to the used stuff man. That's how it ended up in Wekalet el Balah Flea market.

So what happened to Helen's dress?



DESTINY MORRISON  
KEARNEY, MISSOURI



## **Seductress**

Follow me boy. Let's get outta here.  
I know all the right words. You can't resist me dear.

Let's be scandalous. Have some fun.  
It can be out little secret. Come on come on.

Hurry up now doll. I don't want to wait.  
I know you can do it. Take the bait.

You can see it now can't you? I like to toy.  
You don't have to worry. I'll bring you joy.

Just a few minutes. That's all I want.  
Proceed with caution. I love to flaunt.

You're in my grasp. I have you now.  
You won't escape. That's a vow.

You don't have to do much. Just a kiss or two.  
It's not that hard. Let it ensue.

Take my hand. Hold it tight.  
I look easy to handle. But baby, I'm like dynamite.

I'll be gentle. I'll be rough.  
Whatever I choose. It will be enough.

You feel my breath. Right on your chest.  
Oh so tempting. Do you get my jest?

I'm warm beneath your touch. You want more.  
I'm letting you have me. I'm evening the score.

So savor it while you can. I assure you it won't last.  
Whoops, look at that. It's all done; in the past.

Let's finish this tale. I'm bored with you.  
That was much too easy. All I did was coo.

I'll leave you now. You'll never forget.  
I'll haunt your dreams. Aren't you happy we met?

Thank you for your time. I'm the queen of seduction.  
I know what you're feeling. We had a wonderful transaction.

Goodbye now honey. Don't look so grim.  
I know it hurts. But you were only a whim.



## Insignificance

I think  
I dream

I lay around, wide awake  
People watch  
And people stare  
But people are always fake

My mind is jumbled  
My mind is raw  
My mind relieves with a thought  
Fingers seize  
While fingers cramp  
Fingers ache to write before they're caught

Paper holds  
Paper silence  
Paper always knows my secrets  
Pen will draw  
The pen will scratch  
A pen will form all regrets

The world around  
The world within  
The world embraces all that's odd  
We must live  
Or we must die  
And understand that we're all flawed

I think  
And I dream

About this life  
How it's written  
Under the knife  
Plead with yourself  
It is all you've got  
For even with breath

You're just a dot





YAQEEN ALKHANAIZI  
MANAMA, BAHRAIN



ربما تماديت، ربما أفكر أكثر مما فكر أحد من قبلي، لكن ما جعل الدماغ إلا للتفكير! لعلي على حق، ربما خلقت لأخلص البشرية من الفوضى التي تدعى "الحضارة".

يقوم بيت الحضارة على أعمدة واهية ينخرها سوس الأنانية، السياسة، الاقتصاد، المجتمع، هذا وذاك، كلها شوك وكلها علقم.

كلا لست أتمادي، فلا وجود للخطوط الحمراء، ليس بعدما انهار الميزان.

لدي القدرات، لدي العلم، وهو الخيط الرفيع بين الخيال والواقع، لن يتطهر هذا العالم إلا بعدما ينتهي ويبدأ بانفجار آخر. علمي يبدأ من الآن.

من نظرياتي الفيزيائية المفضلة نظرية الرنين، وهي تنص على أن جميع الأجسام في هذا الكون تهتز بتردد مختلف، ولو اضطرب هذا الاهتزاز بجسم مختلف له نفس التردد تزداد سعة اهتزازته ويتهشم، وكم أهيّم في عشق غبار الدمار. الأمر ليس بالصعب، لكل الموجات تردد، يمكنني تطهير العالم بموجة ولتجري الطبيعة مجراها وليحدث ما يحدث. وكم حقيرة هي تلك الموجة، فالضوء موجة كما الفجر موجة وما يفرقهما غير التردد، الأمر أبسط من الجذر التربيعي لسالب واحد، علي خلق التردد المثالي والغاية تبرر الوسيلة.

أفضل مصدر للموجات الطبيعية، وما تأتي نهاية الحضارة إلا من الطبيعة! فلكل حيوان صوته ذا التردد المختلف، وتراكب الأصوات مع بعضها يخلق تردداً مختلفاً.

فتحت الحاسوب وبدأت بتركيب الأصوات لأحصل على سيمفونية الدمار، جربت الحيوانات التي توصف في قصص الأطفال بالشريرة لسبب ما، كالغراب والتعلب، لم يحدث شيء. اليوم والضبع، مجدداً خبيبة الأمل، لكن ماذا عن الحيوانات التي توصف بالخير؟ لكن مجدداً، ليس للأرنب صوت!

انطفئ نور النهار وجربت الكثير الكثير من النغمات، لكن لا تزال هناك نغمة مفقودة، ربما هو جواب لغز الحياة، صوت يجعل كل الأشياء حية، وجعلنا من الماء كل شيء حي، لكن هل صوت الماء الخريز، أم هو المطر؟ ولكليهما ما ليس بالقليل من الأفواه، أهو فم النهر الهائج أم المطر الخفيف؟ النهر الهائج مرفوض، فلا بد من الهدوء قبل العاصفة.

أظنني عثرت عليها، فالطاولة تهتز، عظامي تهتز، أشعر بالأدريالين وهو يجري في عروقي، فعلا الأمر سهل جداً، لكن لست متفاجئاً بالنتيجة، فالنهاية دائماً أيسر البداية.

رفعت الصوت، رفعت حتى اهتز المبنى بأكمله،

صرخت هيا! وشعرت بانفجار في أحشائي وسعلت دماء، صرخت مجدداً، فلنذهب جميعاً إلى الجحيم! ومن هنا، تنأثرت ذراتي وصادقت الغبار الحقيق، ونهاية العالم ما كانت إلا نهايتي.



ALEX CHOI  
IOWA CITY, IOWA



## **They Say**

Get over it, be happy

Take the pills

Go to the therapy

Feel better

Be normal

Cut the tears

Stop the crying

You have straight A's

You have two parents

You have friends

You are normal

That they understand

That they know how I feel

That it's not a real illness

They say just be normal

I can't.



SIRINE ARFAOUI  
TUNIS, TUNISIA



## على ضفاف النهر

على ضفاف النهر  
قرب مالك الحزين  
جلست أخاطب الدهر  
بهمسات داعبها النسيم  
خضعت الظلمة لأشعة القمر  
و انعكست على الماء صور الأساطير  
فغرقت الأحرف و أبطالها في العميق  
و لم تبق إلا تساؤلاتي التي أصرت على ان تطير  
فاختل التوازن و سبق الزفير الشهيق  
و دقت ساعة الحقيقة، ساعة استجواب القدر  
سألته عن السحب و علاقتها بالنجوم  
عن الشمس التي أحياناً تخفيها الغيوم  
فأجابني أنهم جميعاً في نعيم  
لا تتأثر بالواقع الأليم  
فالطبيعة على غرار الإنسان السجين  
تعيش بدون هموم  
سألته عن الكون المجهول و أسرارهِ  
عن الفضاء الواسع و أنوارهِ  
فسخر و قال دعكي من هذا و استمتعي بعطر الياسمين  
فلكل حقل أزهارهِ  
و لا يحق لفان التدخل في ما لا يعنيه  
على ضفاف النهر  
على خزير المياه  
جاء بخاطبني الدهر  
بصوت ردد عقلي التائه صداهِ  
بصوت اخترقني و اخترق الأوهام  
فغدت كتاباتي مجرد كلمات  
و فقدت أشعاري الأوزان



و ليتني صرّت حبرا يختفي بين الألوان  
لكن هيهات  
سألني عن الأحاسيس الزائفة و الشعور  
عن القلب و دواء الجروح  
فأجبتّه مشيرة إلى صدري ها هنا  
فقهقه و قال إن كان الأمر بهذا الوضوح  
لعاش الانسان في هناء  
فهو لا يعيش إلا بالفكر و للفكر  
من عاصفة إلى عاصفة  
و لو عاش ليوم بالعاطفة  
لأدرك معنى الحياه

## **Somewhere to begin**

When you finally know the truth about your role  
When you have to say your final line  
End your last scene and let it go  
And search for another script on the other side  
How were you supposed to know that it'll end like this?  
You didn't plan that you'd be on your own  
You didn't plan that you'd stand in this mist  
Or that you'd face the world all alone  
But you can leave now with these waves  
You can make your own road, find your own way  
Because the boat made of your broken dreams pieces  
Is ready and releases  
The anchor and will make the tough storm through  
Keep all the memories  
To make you feel better when you're sorry  
And to strengthen you, because you won't lose  
Just seek for a new port across the sea of your fears  
Start over and sail with the wind  
You'll find somewhere to begin  
You'll get on a new shore  
Where you can be yourself and much more  
Just start over and sail with the wind  
You'll find somewhere to begin



SARAH GOLDMAN  
FAIRWAY, KANSAS



## Family Recipe

Step One: Piss off your wife. Ingredients and measurements may vary; for best results, try one lost remote, lightly seasoned, two broken dishes, finely smashed, and one carton of spoiled milk. Let simmer for several days, then add one large argument about her sister and allow to boil over. If these ingredients are not available, or if time is limited, several overdue bills may be substituted.

Step Two: Get stuck on dinner duty for the next week. This step will take care of itself once step one has been completed.

Step Three: Stew for several days. Provide food in the form of one or two cartons of Chinese takeout, a frozen dinner, and several handfuls of over-boiled pasta. Dust liberally with resentment and anger, and let sit until the week is almost up.

Step Four: Get stuck alone in the house on your day off. Attempt to fix some of those things you're been meaning to for ages. Fail miserably.

Step Five: Decide that this is ridiculous and that if your wife can make dinner every day after work, then you can damn well do it too.

Step Six: Gather the following ingredients—

- One gallon of bruised pride

- One dusty, beat up old cookbook that either belonged to your wife's grandmother or is an underappreciated wedding gift—evidence is inconclusive

- A pinch of creeping remorse

- A crick in your neck from several nights spent sleeping on the couch

- The entire contents of your fridge—or at least, everything that hasn't gone bad yet during your week of neglect

Step Seven: Spend approximately half an hour staring blankly at your ingredients. Resist the urge to call your wife and beg for help.

Step Eight: Crack open the cookbook. Recover from your immediate sneezing fit and start paging through the recipes.

Step Nine: Attempt the first extravagantly fancy recipe you come across, in the hopes of impressing your wife—or at the very least appeasing her.

Step Ten: Wipe all traces of step nine from your memory, and also from your kitchen walls.

Step Eleven: Take your frustration out on the cookbook and throw it at the wall. When the binding falls apart upon impact, pretend you meant to do that.

Step Twelve: In a fit of desperation, chop all the most appetizing looking ingredients, throw them in a pot with some water, and hope for the best.

Step Thirteen: Pray.

Step Fourteen: Order more takeout, just in case.

Step Fifteen: Wait one hour, and then carefully lift the lid off the pot. Observe that it actually smells pretty decent. Do a fist pump, and then sheepishly look around to make sure nobody saw that.

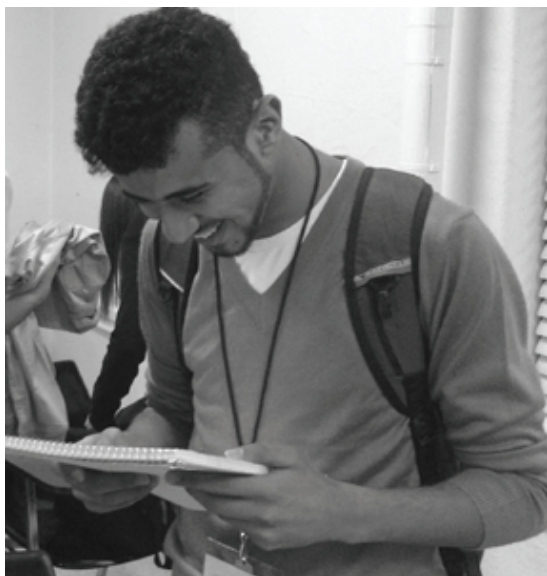
Step Sixteen: Taste a spoonful, cautiously.

Step Seventeen: Fail to spit soup out or keel over. Decide to call that a win.

Step Eighteen: Set the table. Try to remember which side the spoon is supposed to go on, and then give up and put them in the bowls.

Step Nineteen: When your wife gets home, kiss her hello, and also kiss the crick in your neck goodbye.





TAMIM AL-KADASI  
SANA'A, YEMEN



### **The Smell of Your Kiss**

The smell of your kisses

Plays with my senses

So

I could hear your blue eyes,

I could taste your beauty,

I could see your wintry smell,

And I could touch the echo of

I love you

Spelled out from your mouth.

### **No Stopping Station in Our Love Train**

Not to think of you is impossible to stand

Everything reminds me of you more often the rain

Listen to the words I say, read what's written in hand

I call it falling in love, they call it insane

I myself can't understand

So tell me how to explain

I only know this love between us is banned

How much has it taken from us? How much would it remain?

Why everything doesn't go as planned?

I can't move on, this is too much pain

But I can't disobey what my heart command(s);

To love, to care, and never to complain

My heart started to grow, it started to expand

Your enormous love, my heart cannot contain

This is our love, don't care about what people have planned

We cannot stop loving, we cannot refrain

Our love won't stop taking part in this land

Because there is no stopping station in our love train



## تحدثت الكلمات

تدفق قلبي أخيراً  
بحب منبعه الأبدية  
أستيقظت من كابوس الحب الممنوع  
بدأت أعيش ربيع عشقي  
فلقد أستخرجت  
شظايا جرحك اللعين  
فأنت رصاصه سامة  
يجري سمها في عروق دمي

قيدت شرعية حبي لك  
كبلتها بأصفاد الغيرة  
وحبستها في سجن الجنون  
لكني وجدت الترياق  
كسرت اللعنة  
ولم تعد تعويداتك ذات جدوى  
فقد أشرقت شمس أبولو  
على بساتين حبي المقدسة

في سماء الخلود  
ماتت الكلمات  
وتحدثت حروف الصمت  
تحدثت عني  
تحدثت عنك  
تحدثت عنا

تحدثت عن مهاجر غجري  
جل ما يملك  
هو قيتاره  
وضوء القمر  
ليذكرانه بمعشوقته

تحدثت عن جندي مجهول  
نسي عن ماذا يدافع  
أو لماذا اندلعت الحرب  
أسر مرات عدة  
مات  
ولكن لم تنسه حبيبته  
ما زالت تنتظره بفارغ الصبر

تحدثت عن رحالة عربي  
تزوج عدات المرات  
وعرف أكثر من عشيقة  
وكان أباً لعدد من الأبناء  
تعرض للهجوم مرات كثيرة  
عبر مصرأً وشمال أفريقيا إلى المغرب

استكشف بلاد الرافدين حتى الهند

تحدثت عن لاجيء فلسطيني  
طاف كل بلدان العالم  
يتمنى أن يعود الى الوطن  
وطأت قدمه الأراضي المقدسة  
على وطأة رصاصة في رأسه  
مات محققاً حلمه

تحدثت عن راهب بوذي  
يستيقظ في الصباح  
ليبدأ بالتأمل والتفكير  
وينتهي يومه بذلك  
باحثاً عن السلام الداخلي  
وضوء الحكمة  
تجسد روحه بكل أشكال الحياة  
باغياً أن يصل الى النيرفانا

تحدثت عن طالب ال يو دابليو سي  
ومعركته التي يخوضها مع ال اي بي  
ومع نفسه للبحث عن نفسه  
ليالي الأرق وحزن الفراق  
عاش وحيداً  
رغم انه عشق جميع نساء العالم

تحدثت عن أنبياء ورسل  
عن أئمة وقساوسة  
عن رؤساء وشيوخ  
عن فرسان ومحاربون  
عن برايرة ومغول  
ولم تتوقف عن الحديث



SADIE WALTON  
REINBECK, IOWA



## Neighbors

I'm in love with the girl who lives above me, and I've decided to meet her tonight. My hands are clammy as I climb the stairs from my fifth floor apartment, to her sixth. In my right hand, I clutch the letters that I've been saving for this very occasion, and in my left I hold my heart as it dangles from the end of my sleeve. Cats and dogs are falling from my forehead and underarms. For a moment, I consider turning around to change my shirt one last time. The only thing that stops me from going back to my apartment is the fact that every article of clothing I own is currently thrown into big pile of rejection on my bedroom floor. I have to go on as I am; sweaty shirt and all. I reach the dark rectangle of her front door. A combination of letters and numbers are written in gold script, but I'm too nervous to know how to read. It's her door though, I'm sure of it. I take a deep breath, do one last forehead wipe, raise a shaking fist, and knock.

I first heard the girl upstairs six months ago, when she moved into my building. I missed her actually moving in, but I saw her name written in tiny white letters on her apartment's respective mailbox: Morgan Whittaker. At the time, I didn't think much of it. In fact, I had a girlfriend, a very nice one. She had soft hands, and pretty eyes, and a very common name that I can't remember. One night, Generic-name and I wanted to watch a movie. Generic-name put in my all time favorite movie: *Duck Soup*. Of course, Generic-name didn't like it and complained the entire time. When I asked her why she rented it in the first place, Generic-name said she didn't, she said Netflix sent it to us. I was pretty sure that I hadn't added *Duck Soup* to my queue, and when I checked the familiar red envelope, it was addressed to Morgan Whittaker, the girl who moved in upstairs.

After the *Duck Soup* incident, I started to see less and less of Generic-name. I didn't really miss her absence; instead of spending my time with her constant prattling on about nothing; I spent it with Morgan. Morgan would never prattle. In the evenings, I'd microwave some dinner, sit on my warped olive-green couch, and listen. It's amazing what a man can learn about a woman just by listening to her through his ceiling. In the first week, I learned that Morgan likes to watch *America's Next Top Model*, *The Big Bang Theory*, anything on HGTV, and even SportsCenter, every once in awhile. I learned that she plays bass guitar, *really* well. It was like I had John Paul Jones living above me instead of a beautiful young woman. I would listen to her songs and imagine that she was playing just for me. I would see her red fingernails against the black of the base, her dark hair falling like music down her shoulders. Maybe she bites her bottom lip when she plays; I've always liked it when girls bite their bottom lip.

When I heard her stereo blasting Rush is when I truly fell in love. Girls never like Rush, so when *Tom Sawyer* vibrated through my ceiling, I knew she was the one for me. This was when I started to get a little obsessed. My regular listening spot was no longer good enough; I wasn't nearly close enough to the ceiling to listen to my Morgan dance in her kitchen.

I bought a coffee table and a Lazy boy from a yard sale down the street. I moved my Kitchen Table to my living room; duck taped the coffee table onto it, and then screwed the legs of the lazy boy to the very top. When I sat in my make-shift throne, my face was only inches away from her feet. I could practically touch her.

It was the night that my cathedral fell down that I knew enough was enough. It was time for us to finally meet. After I left the emergency room, I made a vow that I would introduce myself to Morgan Whittaker: woman of my dreams, as soon as my stitches came out. And that's how I got to be here, knocking at her door. My elbow still kind of clicks when I bend it, but I'm more or less healed. I hear the familiar shuffling of her delicate feet and I nearly vomit when I see their shadow under the crack of the door. I try to put on my least creepy face when the door starts to open. I only get to what must look like a painful grimace when I see the face of a man looking through my Morgan's door.

I don't know how to respond and just stand there for a few seconds gaping while my eyes scan the apartment for any sign of my beloved Morgan. This tall, broad shouldered, actually pretty attractive man has to be Morgan's brother. His hair is dark, like hers, and the way it falls around his face makes him look oh so debonair. His lips are pouty and red, and for a moment I can't help but wonder if he bites his bottom lip.

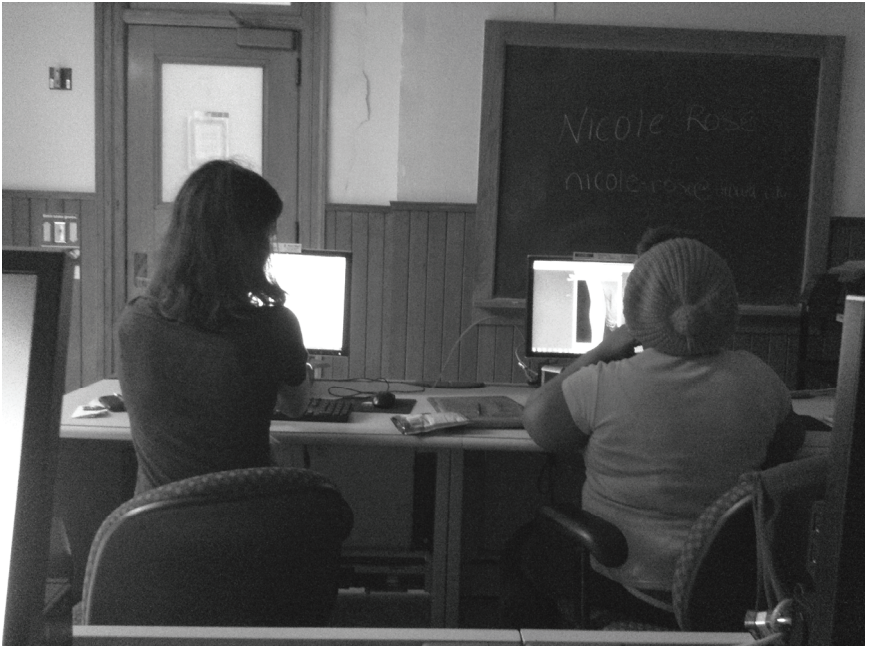
"Is Morgan here?" I manage to dislodge the words from my throat.

"Yeah." He says. I expect him to call for Morgan or step aside to reveal her tiny frame behind his hulking one, but he just keeps looking at me. "Is that mail mine?"

"Well, uh, it's for Morgan. "

"Right. Me. Thanks man." And with that he takes the mail from my sweaty hands, gives me a half smile, and slowly shuts the door.

In hindsight, I should have known that my upstairs vixen was actually an insanely attractive man, but I at least learned something from the experience. I think I may be falling in love with the man who lives above me.





## INTEMAA ABUHELEOU GAZA, PALESTINE



فكرت ملياً فيما أكتبه كختام هذا العمل , فلم أجد أجدر من والدي للكتابة عنه , والذي كان وما زال ملهمي صغيرة حتى كبرت , ضعيفة حتى قويت , مبدعة حتى زدت ابتداءً و ثقة بنفسي وبحروفي وبنراتيل الحاني , و ها أنا يا أبتي وصلت أدراج أبوا بفضل خالقي ثم بفضل دعمك و تشجيعك لي وصبرك علي .. والدي , إن قاسيت الجوع وحرمانه , الظلم وأشكاله , اليأس و مرارته , ولعلها أشد ما تدفع للكتابة ,, لن ينطلق العنان لحروفي لتفصح عن خلجات نفسي كما تتطابر في سماء الإبداع حينما ترى ملهمها فتتغزل بروحه الرفيعة وتطارد همومه التي أتعبته وحرمته أباً و زاد الوجع وجعاً حين حرّمته ابناً .. لأنني أشعر بك وأشعر بتردد صدّى حزنك في داخلي ,, حروفي حزينة يا أبتي .. (بقايا ألم و أمل يا أبتي )

أه وألف آو يا أبتي , كم وودت لو أقتلع جذورَ وجعك وأجعلهُ حكرًا علي قلبي , لو أن تلك الغزارة في هطول دموعك من مقلتي أبنتك, لو أن ذلك البريق الذي أعشقه في ناظريك يعود بأغنيات ملحنة بالأمل مُجددة بالصبر والإيمان , لو أن يديّ آله الزمن لنعود أعواماً إلى الوراء و نقصد كل ثانية فرح أو تعاسة عشناها سوياً , ثوان أضاقها القدر و اختصرتها إرادة الرب لتبدأ فواجع الرحيل والحرمان , لو أني أجد مثلك برمودة لا يأخذ الناس إلى المجهول دون عودة بل يأخذنا سوياً إلى بقعة من الماضي نضمن فيها الخلود الأبدي , لو أن القدر انتشلني أنا وتناسي صُلبك و سَنَدك إلى حين آخر .. لو أن الغد يدبرُ مكيدة ساحر تمقت فتات الألم مقتاً ذريعاً .. أبتي, أرى في مقلتيك البريق يخور إلى يأسٍ و هوان , أرى بسمه تُعرك تبدلت تجاعيد تخط في تفاصيلها جبال هموم و وديان أنين , أرى في شعرك الشائب ظلمة الليل التي تداري بها حنينك و تستر بها ضعفك .. أرى في يديك المرتجفتين رحلة في مدى العمرِ موجعة, أرى في خطواتك رجلاً صنعته محن الحياة حاملاً لا تُقال لا أطنان تعادلها .. أرى في روحك الألم أملاً والأمل صبراً والصبر تمرداً و التمرد يبكي من قهره النسيان .. أبتي , أنت الوسن الذي يجوب ثنائيا الدار فتتوالد منه أشعة بأطراف قزح ترمم جروح الأمل , أنت قنديلنا المضيء في خيام الظلمة و دفاء النار في برود تلك الظلمة , أنت الإشرقة لكل فجر يستهل بحكايات جديدة , أنت ترانيل سعيدة للصباح وإن لم تصدح بغنائها العسافير وللمساء وإن كان الهديلُ غربياً ولليل وإن كان بوحشته مرعباً, أنت في حدائق العمر الماضي والآن والغد , أنت بطل حكاية توالد عقود, حكاية مجلدات أمل وآلم يتصارعان حتى الفناء , أنت نهايتها المرسومة على جبين وطن منتفض .. أنت بكل الحروف أسمى ما أدركه الأولاد والوطن , فأعزني إن لم أوفيك بالحروف حقاً فأنت حتى بالخيال لا توصف ...





SARA “GRACIE” COBB  
DES MOINES, IOWA



## Jessie

The residents that make up New York's Upper East Side are often considered to be the elite of the elite. In this part of the city money blows around like the wind, and to the people of the Upper East Side money means power. If this is true then Jessie Dwight's family has more power than the entire state of Rhode Island. As the daughter of a United States Senator, an anesthesiologist, and the granddaughter of a multi-billionaire real estate mogul Jessie has been around money her entire life. With such strong family connections Jessie has access to the best schools, clothes, and people.

In the Upper East Side prep school scene Jessie Dwight is the "it" girl, and as her title might suggest she is known for throwing the best parties. For the students that attend prep school on the Upper East Side snatching an invitation to a "Jessie Dwight" party means your social status is safe another week. For most people all this focus on partying and socializing would get in the way of schoolwork, but not Jessie. She has managed to maintain a 3.5 GPA and complete 200 hours of community service at a local food pantry, but she'll never admit it to anyone at the risk of blowing her image.

Jessie Dwight had the perfect life. Jessie's entire family was full of rich and successful people and everyone expected the same thing from her. She felt an immense amount of pressure to live up to her family's reputation she just wasn't sure how to go about it. She couldn't understand why all her friends were so excited to leave and go off to college. They all wanted to leave, but Jessie wanted to life in the exclusive Upper East Side bubble forever.

That fall when Jessie went off to college she found the first semester harder to handle than she had originally expected. It wasn't like high school where everyone knew who she was and practically worshiped the ground she walked on. This was real life and she realized that this time the problems she faced couldn't be fixed with money. This time no one cared how rich she was or who she knew. When she got lost on the way to class they just kept walking, when she went to the dining hall for meals every day she sat alone, and while everyone was studying together Jessie was studying alone in her room. She wanted so badly to go back to high school and be at the center of it all. She thought she would never find friends, and that she would spend the next four years being laughed at by her peers.

Jessie always made sure that the laundry room was empty before she went in to use the machines. She didn't want people to see how much trouble she was having acclimating to chores such as doing her own laundry or cooking her own food when she missed dinner because class ran a little late. One day while Jessie was in the laundry room a blonde haired, brown eyed girl strolled in carrying a white laundry basket. She set her basket down on top of one of the washing machines and began dropping her clothes in an adjacent machine.

While she was waiting for her clothing the blonde haired girl began talking to Jessie. She introduced herself as Kate, a pre-law major hoping to become a lobbyist in the senate. Jessie told Kate about her father and his position as a US Senator. Kate was impressed and asked if Jessie would let her meet him someday.





ILYAS SAMIG  
TATA, MOROCCO



## **Summoning Trouble**—an excerpt from a short story

It is a regular day. Summer is almost over, and I'm hanging out with my friends. I've spent the last three months doing nothing. Doing nothing is fun with the company of your closest friends, until the fun expires, and then it's time to think of something else to do, and that is just what I intend to do. I tell my friends that we must do something full of fun, something joyful and entertaining. After a while of thinking, all I can come up with is to wear our scary black uniforms and frighten some rich people, but not just anywhere -- it has to be done in their own houses. I still remember the last time we did it; it was most definitely a lot of fun, not because we got to spread fear in the hearts of the people living in the house, but because the old lady in the house had a gun, and she ran after us like a hungry tiger, and we ran away like chickens. Someone could have died that night, but I think we deserved it. I come up with another idea, which is to go on a trip. Going on a trip sounds a bit lame compared to breaking into houses, but since our last confrontation with the police over a stolen pair of rabbits and a shop's broken glass, we can't afford any mistakes. Getting away with the crime the first time doesn't mean we could get away with it for a second time, especially now that we are under the eye of the police. So, we choose to go on the trip, and then maybe try to scare some rich people later.

It is Sunday morning, the day to make preparations and plans for the upcoming trip. But for most of us, Sunday mornings are busy with religious rituals, because we are all from different religious backgrounds. I am Christian so I have to be at the church. My friend Iqbal is Hindu, and I never bothered to ask him what Hindus do on Sunday mornings, but I know he is waiting for me outside the church so we can go meet up with the rest of the gang. When I am done praising the lord, I come out of the church; I see Iqbal, and we start walking towards the Jewish quarter to meet Elijah. Soon we come across Jacob, another recruit on the team. We all head to the orthodox synagogue, where we meet Elijah who joins us, so we keep walking toward our small hideout.

Our hideout is just a shelter two kilometers outside our small city, hidden at the bottom of a mountain. It was built at least eighty years ago to protect the people in case a war was declared. The first time we found the shelter, we had gotten in a fight with some kids who outnumbered us and had taken off down a dusty road that led deep into the forest. We rounded a corner, and, while momentarily out of site of our assailants, tried to hide in a patch of thick brush on the side of the road. As we tried to force our way through the brush, I smacked my body on a metal door, and it opened up, and we got in. The shelter has been our secret hideout ever since then. We made it feel like it is our home, even building a cage on the roof to raise animals.

At the hideout, we sit in the middle of the room around the fireplace. Each of us talks about what we did since the last time we saw each other, which, since we are all close friends, happens to be yesterday. While we are conversing, Iqbal is making us tea. Just a few minutes before the tea is ready to be served, Hocine walks into the room and to his seat. The clique is now finally complete, which means it is time to discuss the matters of the upcoming trip. We don't know where to go. Everyone makes a suggestion, but it is Hocine's proposal that we like the most. He suggests we start from the hideout, and from there we follow the road to go deeper into the mountains, until we find a good site to settle in. We decide to go on Tuesday so that we will have enough time to get food and drinks, and anything else that we will need.

Tuesday, at three o'clock in the morning, I am already awake and stuffing my bag, because I can't sleep. Thirteen minutes later, I head to the hideout. As I reach the Jewish quarter of the city, I decide to go get Elijah to accompany me. I look to his family's house, but all the lights are off. I think if I knock on the door, his dad will probably be the one to come out. Elijah's dad and I never get along, and, especially at this late hour, I think it would turn into a tense situation, so I don't knock, and I keep on my way to the hideout. By the time I am at the brush surrounding the old shelter, I make my way into it, and then I open the door and enter. I see Hocine standing and facing the east, and as soon as I hear him

reciting the Koran, I realize he is doing the Morning Prayer. I wait for him until he is done praying, so we can talk until the rest of us get here. An hour passes before anybody else shows up. Jacob arrives first followed by then Iqbal and Elijah. We carry our bags and head out down the dusty road that leads past our hideout.

Thirty minutes later, we come to a fork in the road, and since Hocine is leading, we are just following him; Hocine looks down the road on the right and whispers, « I know that way. » To my surprise, though, he leads us down the road on the left. I recall a memory where Hocine told me something about the road we just passed by. I can't quite remember the details, but I remember him saying there is some sort of a school for Muslims only, which I named at first Muslim's shaolin temple, but the name was long so I changed it to Maolin temple. We all know he goes there at least once a week, but he never tells us exactly what he does over there.

Not but two hours into our walk, I notice the sky is changing from blue and clear to dark and cloudy, and the clouds are changing from white and bright to grey and gloomy. Even the rocks on the two mountains on either side of the road are becoming dusky and dim. One second I can hear the sound of life, the next second I can hear the sound of silence. If it weren't for the sounds of us breathing and walking, I would name this place hell on earth. The further we walk down the road, the bigger the trees around us grow. I look everywhere, and it seems like everything in this cursed land is painted in a damned black color. A few steps ahead of me, it is almost completely dark. I can only see Hocine, who is walking in front of me. Grotesque shadows are on either side of us. I never turn back to check on the rest of us for fear that Hocine will just disappear when I turn around again. Hocine is the one I want to be standing next to when trouble occurs, because I think he must be brave for taking the lead and being in the frontline. It feels like we are walking in an endless tunnel, and I am starting to lose hope on finding a decent spot to settle in. I am about to voice my thoughts when I see a bright shining dot in the distant horizon.





NI'SHELE JACKSON  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS



qwerty conversations with a desktop by  
ni'shele jackson

even the spelling of my name is up for  
debate

you curse at me with green squiggles  
blue squiggles  
red ones the most outrageous  
is leak of odrer ininsaty

or is it correcting the same thing and  
expecting a different outcome

you tell me desktop  
why you so pissed off  
but when i print this off  
you try to hide your disgust  
the lines fade

and only i remember this game we played  
only i remember how many squiggles you  
bludgeoned my eyes with

telling me this that and those were wrong  
telling me this like i didnt know  
that 'i's  
should always be capItallized

last time i checked this was my blank sheet  
not yours  
and these are my mistakes to keep  
not yours

but they're not mistakes at all  
tell me desktop  
how do you know who Barbie is  
but not Zora  
equally uncommon names  
both influential  
but one a forementioned name  
you refuse to know  
because what's done in a Malibu beach house  
trumps what's done in a Harlem Renaissance  
and what's up with you acknowledging  
Shakespeare  
but not Redmon Fauset  
and does capitalization equal validation  
can we ask bell hooks  
and aint aint a word right  
ignore my vernacular and ignore me  
i just wanted to play a game with you  
see if you'd lose composure  
there is nothing more  
i was just testing you  
i was just testing you





TALA EL-ROZ  
SALMIYA, KUWAIT



## Painting Flowers

“Slept well last night, honey?”

“Yes, surprisingly better than usual”, Rachel lies.

She sits down at the dining table in her kitchen. Her husband had prepared breakfast for them both, a ritual he performed once every month, one he had been undertaking on the same day for four years now. Rachel ate silently at the dinner table, though, in her mind, her thoughts had never been so loud. It is seemingly difficult to interpret the activeness of humans’ minds when they seem still, the only motion they have is through their thoughts, and their only gestures mere memories and remembrances.

Rachel gets up. Silently, she walks to her bathroom. Staring at herself in the mirror, Rachel reminisces repeatedly; holding on to the past is the only thing that drives her forward, her old happiness being used as fuel to guide her through the difficult roads she currently encounters. Roads where you have to keep on going even though you do not yet know where the destination leads – dark paths that offer no means of hope, no means of true termination. Roads with no fuel, and the only fuel that drives anything forward comes from the happiness of the past.

At any second, a dead end might arise, effectively stopping the motion on the road. Yet, to Rachel, she’d rather travel forever, exhausting herself both mentally and physically, than know where and when the dead end might appear. Even though she knew it would expose itself very soon.

Her husband’s shaver and her scissors on the sink surface stare at her. It seems as if they, too, regret this day, the day that they are used not because they are needed, but because they help portray a huge lie. What lie?

And with that, Rachel picks up her scissors, and cuts one strand of her extremely short hair. The ground catches it. She cuts another strand. And another. And another. She picks up the shaver. She turns it on.

She is now bald.

She quickly clears away the pile of hair on the ground. She then brushes her teeth and washes her face. She dries her face, but it is still wet. She dries it again, but its wetness prevails.

She then realizes she is crying.

Oh, how she had become so used to crying that she feels numb to its very existence. She continues staring at herself, her face getting wetter and wetter, but her eyes never once blinking. She stares at her head – her now, shining head. Forcing herself to stop crying, she puts on a fake smile. This smile would now remain the whole day.

Nine a.m.

Rachel opens the door to her daughter’s room. Curled up in her bed, her little daughter slept. Gently, she woke her up.

“Good morning, sweetheart.”

“Good morning mom.”

Her six-year-old daughter got up. Oh, how the innocence in her eyes gleamed a pure light that can only be seen from children – children who can only see happiness in life, children who are oblivious to life’s monstrosities. Humanity’s troubles, blood red in our eyes, are plain colourless to theirs.

Her daughter’s innocence had always saved her from any explanation. Her daughter had asked her why they looked “different” to other people, why their heads “glistened” and others didn’t. Why the rest had hair and they both did not. And her mother always answered with “because we are special and they aren’t” and the daughter would smile to herself, with a happiness that was beyond reach of any adult.

“Special”, she’d say, “My mother and I are special”.

It’s been four years. Four years since Rachel found out. Four years since she took the decision to start cutting. Doctors had told her living past the age of seven was impossible for her little daughter. Doctors had told her she would not feel any pain. Rachel could never tell her daughter she had cancer. She could never tell her she was going to die. For the past four years, every single month, Rachel would cut her hair, to make her daughter feel special instead of “different”. She would convince her daughter that other people were “different”, but that she, herself, was special, that they were both special.

Even though she knew that the dead end was near, she did not know the exact date that her destination would be reached, and that her little daughter’s fate would be fully met. All she knew was that even though the actual journey to the end was full of dread, dismay and depression, she would make it seem as if it was the best “trip” ever. She would make her daughter feel special, instead of sick. Her daughter would feel like a human, and not a disease.

Carrying her daughter on her back, she knew she’d face that wall that will obstruct her journey with a bucket of paint. Instead of its blatant image of death, she’d paint it with flowers. Instead of death forcing her daughter away, her daughter would happily accept it.

She kissed her daughter on the head, and smiled.

### شتاء أم علي

هو فصل الشتاء في القرية. رياح دائمة وعواصف وغيوم لا يمزقها سوى ضوء الصواعق كأنه جرح أبيض على وجه السماء الأسود. "الجنرال تلج" يحتل الأرض ويغلق الطرق ويفرض قوانينه على الناس المختبئة داخل منازلها خوفاً من السقوط وكسر العظام... وحدها أم علي، تخرج كل يوم بعد صلاة الفجر حاملة أعوامها الأربعين على كتفيها، ومتحدية "الجنرال" بخطوات بطيئة لكنها ثابتة وقوية، وخارقة قوانين منع التجول التي فرضتها السجادة البيضاء بين الحقول والبساتين.

بين صواعق السماء وصقيع الأرض، تستمر أم علي في السير مرتدية معطفاً ثقيلاً وشالاً تلف به رقبته وفمها إضافة إلى حجابها الأسود السميك. رحلتها اليومية تستغرق نصف ساعة للذهاب ومثلها للعودة. تخرج من منزلها والأجواء مظلمة تماماً وتعود إليه مع إنزال الشمس صغيرة من ضفافها إلى الأرض لتضيء ما أطفأته الليالي وتنعوض غياب القمر خلف الغيوم. تعرف أم علي طريقها إلى أطراف القرية حتى لو كانت عيناها مغمضتين، فقدمها تسيران عليه منذ ثلاث سنوات بلا توقف. تمر قرب مخفر الشرطة وتلتفت إلى الحارس الواقف عند الباب وهو يرتدي ثيابه العسكرية وأمامه مدفاة صغيرة... "نهارك سعيد يا أبو حسين" تحببه تحبة كل يوم بوجه كئيب حزين متعب ونظرة منكسرة خجولة وصوت ضعيف، فيرد: "نهارك أسعد يا أم علي الله يقويك، البرد قارس والشتاء قاس جداً علينا، انتبهى في الطريق".

"انتبهى في الطريق"... هذه هي الجملة الوحيدة التي لا تحب أن تسمعها لأن الانتباه إلى الطريق هو آخر ما تريده، إذ كيف ينتبه الإنسان إلى شيء يكرهه، فهذا الطريق عدو أم حسين اللدود وعندما تسير عليه تضغط بجزمتها المطاطية بكل قوة على الأرض وكأنها تريد أن تخدم أنفاسها أو تخففها. تتمنى لو أن الطريق إنسان كي تقتله.

تواصل السير وشفتها تزرقان من البرد فيما الدماء تكاد تتوقف في شرايينها تماماً كما تتجمد المياه في نهر القرية. تصل إلى المكان الذي تقصده وتقول: "السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته"، ثم تقترب من ابنها وتضع يدها على كتفيه وتقبله، فينتشر الدفء في جسدها ويعود اللون الأحمر إلى شفيتها. تزيل الشال عن رقبته وأنفها وتبدأ بالحديث: "صباح الخير يا علي، صباح الحب، صباح الورد يا غالي... كيف حالك؟ بردان يا ماما؟ والدك يهديك السلام، كان يرغب في المجيء معي لكنك تعرف أنه عاجز ولا يستطيع السير خصوصاً في هذا الجو المخيف".

تمر نسمة هواء فيهر التلج من الأشجار على حجاب أم علي ووجهها لكنها لا تشعر بأي شيء. وجهها الكئيب التعيس الحزين تركته خارج المكان وارتدت وجهها آخر يموج بالفرح والسعادة. تكمل حديثها مع علي: "أعرف أن الوقت هو الفجر لكنني أعرف أيضاً أن لا وقت لديك للحديث والراحة إلا هذا الوقت، وأرجوك لا تقل لي كما تقول كل يوم بأنك متضايق لأنني أزورك في هذا الوقت وهذه الأجواء العاصفة، فرويتك عندي بالدنيا كلها والحديث معك هو الشيء الوحيد الذي يلون صباحاتي ويعطيني الطاقة والقوة لأخدم أبيك العاجز".

ينهمر المطر بغزارة قاصداً قطع الحديث بين أم علي وعلي، لكنها تستمر في الحديث: "لست متضايقاً من المطر يا ماما بل إن المطر متضايق مني، والله يقول: وخلقنا من الماء كل شيء حي، ولولا الماء يا حبيبي لما كانت الورود نبتت حول بيتك. لكن صدقتي، ولا تقل إن والدتك تجامل، أنت أخلى ورده بين هذه الورود كلها".

يلتحم المطر بالهواء بالتلج المتطاير مثل القطن. تنعدم الرؤية تماماً وتشعر أم علي بأن العاصفة تتأمر عليها لتجبرها جبراً على الرحيل: "طيب يا ماما، إذا كانت هذه رغبتك فأنا سأطيعك إنما هذه المرة فقط. حاضر، سآزورك غداً، ألا تشتهي طبخة من يد أمك؟ عصير؟ حلويات؟ لشيء؟ حاضر، إنما لو غيرت رأيك أخبرني... تصبح على خير يا علي، تصبح على حب، تصبح على الورد يا غالي".

تقف مجدداً وتقول لكل من حولها: "السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته"، تعود إلى منزلها وهي تلعن الطريق مجدداً. تمشي بسرعة أكبر رغم الطقس السيئ، ولا تلف الشال على رقبته وفمها. تعبر مجدداً من أمام المخفر بوجه مشرق مبسم ونظرة جريئة غير منكسرة. "يعطيك العافية يا أبو حسين"، فيرد "الله يعافيك يا أم علي... كيف علي اليوم؟". تجيب: "الله يحميه... قمر مثل كل يوم"... تكمل سيرها إلى المنزل.

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شتاء أم علي طويل... طويل... طويل...





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