

**Ramsha ASHRAF**  
**Poems**

**We Were the Daughters**

We were the daughters  
Of the witches  
Who could set fire to skeletons  
Of the ones who wanted  
To castrate and crush  
The petals of our flowering youth  
To get their hands fragrant.  
We played this 'fire-game'  
But not all the time,  
We had our moments of transcendence too  
We also had licked the sweat of the men  
Who could brew us coca beans  
Who could feed us bread,  
We also had our territories of peace,  
With our men in our land of significance,  
We were not witches but the daughters  
Of the ones who once had gotten bewitched  
Not because they wanted to, but they were asked to.

Unlike our mothers we knew the meanings of tenderness and  
love-pecks,  
We could let our lovers use their bones  
On our paper-flesh as pens,  
We could sip the stories from their lips  
But we also knew, where and when,  
To leave them deserted with their strangled isolation  
Haunting their no-more-lovely faces.  
We were the daughters of the witches  
They forgot to burn in the wombs of their mothers.

**For the One Who Died in the Hands of Wrong Men**

For Shagufta Parveen

I shrink to myself when I think  
Of the pain she might have felt  
While lying there on the railway track  
Which took her to nowhere  
After being everywhere  
In the clouds of easy smoke  
Which could be produced  
After burning cheap tobacco,  
In the gatherings  
Of no brave yet hollow men,  
In the reddening of the eyes  
Of people who had embraced  
Death of their desires long ago.

I shrink to myself when I think  
Of the people who had held  
Her index finger and led her  
To the dead track  
Where she breathed her last,  
Friends, friends were those  
Who made her dance naked  
With flower- bands around her wrists  
I shrink to myself when I see the blood  
Of her metaphors flowing through  
The veins of my empty poems  
Struggling in the darkness  
To survive the death on another rail track.

### Death Sirens

You're inside me  
in, what you call, simple adjustable position,  
and your limbs are touching mine.  
Locked in each other's arms  
we are trying to explore the caves  
behind our lips.  
Suddenly, we hear a call for funeral ceremony  
from a nearby mosque.  
Our passions melt down.  
We try hard to make it up again  
but, we can't find a way.  
Hopelessly, desperate from the sickening desire  
you know what you feel right:  
you soak me in the white fluid  
that I don't know if I adore  
more than the hair on your chest.  
You ask me: "what's the matter?"  
I say 'nothing'  
ignoring the fact  
that I'm stuck with  
the death sirens.

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**Bride-to-be**

He says when he saw me for the first time he had thought of me as a poet: "chaos hidden underneath calm". I listened to the husky attractive notes very carefully, trying in vain to hide the chaotic thunders his voice was producing within the calm and composed self. Though I sipped the barley of every beat and every rhyme his voice was soaked in, but I couldn't ignore his charcoal-face while he stood in the front to photograph me, a paradox. Photographers always have fascinated me, not in a way he did. The one who would never speak of nostalgia but would capture it, not in a dull black and white medium but in a way that would make the individual, while looking at the photograph, forget about his spatiotemporal intricacies. Archaeology of humming nostalgia that could be witnessed in the wrinkled face and could be heard through the clicks his camera produce. He says that I am the first pearl-hair on the burnt skin of his chest. I don't know what it means, but I don't want to stop him and ask him the useless meaning, so I imagine myself like a pearl-thread hanging somewhere around neck on his chest underneath that camera. The essentials.

**Afternoons of Extravagant Delight**

Picking on the dead flesh  
The dead writes on the dead's body.  
He inks the pilgrimage to find sanctuary  
From that dull, dismissive, charcoal night  
Toward the afternoons of extravagant delight,  
Not realizing, maybe in a desire of not wanting to realize,  
That the pale flesh does not breathe, move and respond  
To his elongated fingertips, his unfamiliar eyes move but do not see,  
His finger-pores leave messages but withhold his characteristic warmth of oblivion.  
Delightful, it could be, if the flesh-bearer could, again, sense the monotonous ink of love.

**Poison Echoed**

Kind words explode in ears  
Coming from kind people.  
All goes to the trash-bin,  
Of my memoryless nerves.  
His caramel voice echoes:  
"You're all chaos!  
But hidden underneath calm"  
Caramelized voice but burnt  
Like the skin of a reptile  
Like dark herbs' extracts  
Like an old bark of an old tree,  
It echoes:  
"Post-Wasteland experiences are driving your frenzy for  
wreckage into mania"  
Pause, too fragmented for me to grasp.  
It echoes again:  
"Poetry is wreckage of your life"  
The voice meets an unknown stone-spirit and diminishes.  
It still echoes, but,  
It never speaks to me  
Like it happens in Babylon  
With laymen and prophets.  
Kind words die with the poison,  
Of their own meanings,  
Once his voice echoes.  
Kind people die with the poison,  
Of their own leanings,  
Once his voice meets the stone-spirit.  
Stone-spirit, the fossil, I have become  
Over the years of sustained wreckage.

**I Don't Let You See My Poems**

I don't let you see my poems anymore.  
[We have crossed the beginning,  
And now, we are moving  
Towards the middle  
Where triggering the infatuation  
May lead to an open-ended tragedy]  
I know it is difficult for you to absorb  
Spectator's opinions about the subjects,  
Like the difficulty you face in kissing  
The taut, watery bristles my breasts carry,  
You come to me in the dark, just to avoid  
The ugly blemished sight of small gutters,  
With a hundred-thousand love-veil on your face.  
Of course, love is still there.  
[Maybe, we want to end it in the middle]  
It is your breathing that I do not want to make difficult for you  
So, I cover and coil my breasts with thin linen of acceptance and  
distance.  
Of course, love is still there in the air between veils and linen.  
Neither among us deny that. Cannot.  
The poems still exhale protective stinky fluids,  
To smudge faces, to keep their opinions away,  
Like the vesicles secrete crude oils to mark your distance  
[End is certainly a delusion]

**Dead Cornea: Lifeless Pupil**

In an utter desire to disappear from the fringe of my own sight, I write this to you...

I know I have not been a good child unlike your other children. Now, when I feel that I am left all alone by those who claimed to stay there, to provide me with their shoulders to put my head on, and now when there are only those left around who have never withhold themselves from adding onto the toxicity of this already lethal stigma which we call life, I only desire to be with you. The distance has always played a cruel actor in the drama of my life. It already has snatched many precious people away from me, and now it is forcing me to bear the similar kind of loneliness for the thoughts that connect your affection with my ragged being. I confess, in the darkest of times, that I need another life of the kind to learn how I would breathe through this one. The life which is according to our world or, maybe the life, which is appropriate in the other world; the real world waiting for us out there.

It is so bitter that I have begun to ignore the darkness. The metaphor which has played the role of almost an eternity for my mortality. I cannot even see, rather sense, darkness anymore. It is just my breathing which has kept me bothering about gazillion useless yet valuable issues. I have shared this plenty of times before, not with you, not with anyone else but, with him that I don't want to breathe anymore. And, I know somewhere in the brains of my heart that it will keep moving forward for it has a few more nightmares to offer during the dazzling daylight and a few more scars to proffer within an ugly facade of salvation.

**The Sun-god**

We keep revolving  
Like burnt shadows  
In the same orbit  
Of love.  
It is nowhere.  
Nowhere,  
Near us.  
The sun-god  
That commands  
Union.

**"How little careers speak of us"**

Either a librarian or an interpreter  
You give books away,  
I speak thoughts out,  
Writing letters to Monica,  
Or waiting for the disappeared ones to come back,  
Work stays there creating an aura, blurring visions,  
Instigating hate and love simultaneously,  
Melting fats, and sucking acids.  
You couldn't change it,  
I can't do it either,  
But there comes a time  
When no one walks,  
To the field of eternity,  
To meet no one.

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**Caterpillar–moments**

The caterpillar–moments succeed!  
When you wake up to yourself,  
Nauseated,  
Fading away from the fear  
Of being brought to reckoning.  
The first week after you have given the birth,  
Fear takes control over your nerves.  
Nausea persists.  
It does even in the dreams about holy love.  
It needs courage to admit,  
Publicly,  
That all you have wanted  
Is to throw up the love  
That you have stored  
As pupa,  
You won't declare it.  
Who puts the metal hand in fire?  
Who gives the name to a bastard?  
Who owns a badly written poem?  
Half-cooked, rotten thought  
Of measured faiths engulfed  
By the silly pupa  
Will remain abandoned

**It's 4:40 in the morning**

It's 4:40 in the morning  
And it is raining.  
I am sitting here, alone,  
In the dark, listening  
To the sky-talks.  
It is different, today,  
To think  
About the madness  
Of fidelity  
At this hour  
When I expect myself  
To dream of a woman  
Walking  
If not poignantly  
Then, at least freely  
Without sticks.  
I have a cigarette,  
Tucked inside foot-bandage  
This is how you learn  
To hide 'you' in 'you',  
To smoke your foot-wounds  
Without letting pain touch  
Your knees,  
The rest, including blood, can hold on.  
This is madness of fidelity:  
Water betraying heavens for earth,  
Leaves falling off stems for mud  
Fire dying for none but fire.  
They don't dream of walking freely  
But, they keep one cigarette  
Hidden underneath the bandage  
Which is wrapped around  
Their wounded feet.  
One day, they, all, will embrace sanity.

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