

## The Garosha

In front of the house a big yard, hedged by high oaks shielding the view of all signs of outside life, allowed for the life of the mind, inviting the neighborhood women to gather round for a daily chat. In the middle of the yard stood a very old garosha (grindstone), erected there like a holy relic. Its two round grinders were made of firestone. From its upper rim rose a thick stick, painted green. The housekeeper was very proud of the garosha--an inheritance from her grandmother. The women would sit around it while one of them, stretching her leg and gripping the grinder between them, milled the coarse or the light grain. ...many sad, happy stories, scandals, chatter and gossip accompanied the crunching sound of that garosha while it milled the grain. It circled slowly or rapidly, keeping the rhythm of their talk. Swallowing the grain with its open mouth like a beast. Starting with a roar and finishing with a moan. All the women enjoyed sitting beside the garosha, except Fatma. Only intending to sit at its the edge, she felt a quiver of terror as a roaring voice shouted: "You, girl, get away, are you mad?" That was Fatma's uncle, a heavy man with an awful belly, a thick black stick, just like her grandfather's cane, in his fist. Noticing the blood in her uncle's eyes Fatma ran away to her mother, but she too was helpless.

The uncle followed her, shouting: "Don't you remember, woman, your daughter was left in your charge, but you can't keep your house together, your daughter is just about to cause a scandal!" Her mother asked fearfully: "What did she do?" The heavy man said, furious: "She sat on the garosha!" Then the mother got mad, slapping her daughter who had no idea of what was going on. The girl ran to another room, hiding in solitude. Questions ran through her head: "What is that damned garosha? Why am I the only one forbidden to touch that cursed garosha?" She had no answers. "My Mother had always been proud of it. All the women, Am-A' dnan, AmMuhamad, Am-Salih, all of them have always praised that garosha, eager to pay a lot of money for it. My mother always refused, saying it is a rare relic. Only I have been punished, and for touching it just once!" When her mother calmed down Fatma dared to ask: "Mama, what is the secret of that cursed garosha why did you and my uncle get so angry at me?"

The mother gazed mutely, didn't give any meaningful answer. This happened a long time ago, Fatma was eleven years old. Now she is over seventeen. The time when girls start whispering behind locked doors. One day when Fatma and her friends were talking about forbidden things, A' faf asked Fatma a strange question: "Fatma, have you ever fallen from a high place, or sat on something hard...?" Fatma didn't understand the question and asked: "Why?"

I have read that sports and falling on hard things can hurt girls. Why it can hurt boys too."

--"What an idiot, didn't you hear about the bride that was found to be a 'woman' on the first night of her marriage?"

--"What does that mean?"

--"Oh god, you don't understand. Never mind. I am only worried about me now. I am scared because I remember that I fell on something hard."

--"What could happen?"

--"Maybe I've lost my virginity ... then I may well be killed like that woman...."

The words ring a bell, an impulse awakens a noise in her body, all the sounds of the world burst out in her mind.. She remembers her uncle shouting at her mother "You woman,

people are still talking about the husband who found his bride a 'woman.'

Did you forget that? Her parents killed her that same day!"

Only now does she understand why her uncle tried to pull out the thick stick of the garosha, finally breaking her mother's only relic.

She ran home and rushed to her mother asking anxiously: "Did I sit on the garosha ?"

Amazed, her mother looked at the pale face of her daughter:

--" What made you think of that garosha now?"

-"Just tell me, please, did I?"

The mother said: "I don't remember anything, why?"

Fatma told her nothing. The ghost of the garosha occupied her dreams.

The dreams turned into nightmares, torturing her.

When time came to be married, she refused. Then the heavy man with his black stick came to talk her into marriage and she, knowing what he might do to persuade her, agreed.

The day came, her bridegroom approached her and held her in his arms, but she was passive like a helpless animal, her body felt like rotten wood she felt the garosha clicking in her mind; her future husband was at the end of his restraint. She couldn't let go of the wretched vision of the garosha while she felt something invading her, felt a hot liquid flowing from inside her, looked at a stain of blood, inhaling the odor of harrowing memories. But the thick stick still troubled her mind.

## IN THE BOTTLENECK

During the day, she scrapes the walls of the house  
 With her teeth  
 Her skin absorbs the dust of the road.  
 During the night,  
 She grinds her knees,  
 Blood flows from her eyes,  
 And water on her bed.

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During the day, she washes her empty time  
 By counting the rooms  
 By chewing live meat,  
 And at night, an icy wall,  
 A lifeless mass  
 Slips between her thighs,  
 She squeezes the agony of her time,  
 An illusory man.

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During the day, she plucks out her hair,  
 Waiting for the coming morning  
 And at night, she hides the key of her keyhole  
 In the invisible  
 For fear that dead skin  
 Might gather between her breasts

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During the day, she shoos away flies  
 From her spoiled memories  
 And at night, obsessed by madness  
 Flowing from her head to her feet,  
 She sleeps face down,  
 Crushing her dream,  
 Till another day rises  
 To wash,  
 To pluck out,  
 To shoo away,  
 Then another night falls...!

## ABDULLA

When Abdulla is filled with sorrow,  
 His shoulders embrace his eyebrows.  
 Eating by himself,  
 And leaning on a chance,  
 He carries his provisions:  
 "Some olives and his mother's breath."

He presses them to his chest  
 And ties them to his waist,  
 Fearing the loss  
 Of the last drops of warmth,  
 And wipes with his tattooed hands,  
 With the leaves of years,  
 A face like an old stone,  
 Ruined by waters at the bottom of the sea.

He sniffs twice,  
 Opens his mouth,  
 Yawning like a bored cat,  
 And moves his heavy feet,  
 Pushing his nose ahead of him,  
 In search of a morsel.

## HYMNS WITHOUT RHYTHM

Oh you, standing erect in front of me!  
 Filled inside your gathered shirt,  
 Your body is a whale  
 That preferred imprisonment

Untie your nets!  
 Set yourself free!  
 Deflower the waves!  
 And stir up the foam.  
 Your gathered shirt will melt away!