

**Sadek R. MOHAMED**

Poems

**Checkpoints**

From the widow of the bus you see how words congeal  
and how seats tremble  
with every comma  
these fretful mornings embed  
after every word of their weak sentences.  
Nobody checks this grammar.  
No body objects  
or wishes to continue...  
You hear the teacher's ghost scream:  
"Bad semantics!"  
and you close the window.

**Three Scenes, One City  
Baghdad 2007**

I

Thick forests of cold cement  
their trees are planted  
by veiled creatures that look like men  
and masters of falsehood, flattery and madness.  
Flowers didn't bloom this spring.

II

Demons have their wily rhythms.  
They plant bombs  
behind every stone  
and check our stealthy motion  
in offices, markets and classrooms.

III

Poems are engulfed in darkness  
and what's in the street is dull and sullen.  
The poet's heart leans on the solitary lamppost  
and his eyes gaze at his famished children.

## Nothing

There is nothing else to do now.

Nothing.

No road to lose

or to venture on

or wall to collide with.

No water to tame

or to fathom its mystery.

No fire to forge

or to borrow..

No day to dream of

or fashion with sun.

Nothing.

We spread our silence

on the edges of time,

and fall to the sideline

of the wind.

## Insomnia

There again is this intense insomnia  
shutting the door behind us.  
On her bed  
she piles up pebbles  
and in a certain corner  
of the body of the night,  
draws a map for the senses.

Nights are not revealing their mysteries any more.  
Nothing is left but figures  
we see with closed eyes.  
Nothing is left but a deep-black  
horizon.

"Don't tremble too much  
the spirits of the absent are here  
dreaming of the life that can be lived" she said.  
What's the benefit of this  
charting of the time?  
What's the benefit of listening  
to the whimper of this endless waiting?

Our blood is discoloring  
what rudeness...

Here, in what is left  
of these ruins,  
people are crushed,  
trampled down like the road...

But like a pine tree  
dreaming of mysteries and streams,  
we always assume  
the fire will recover its youth again

Two heads fall on the pillow.  
Water gushes out  
underneath the cloak of the night.

## **In This Mud There is Desire**

The storm has come to an end.

There is a wish,  
there is an overwhelming desire  
to surprise time,  
there is a thrilling moment...

We need some water  
for words to wash themselves  
and say their prayers

We need some time  
for orange trees  
to sway as they like

We need some silence  
for virgins to answer  
the call of music

Let seagulls  
emerge from the breast of the earth  
for waves to toss their fringe  
and make a new elixir for life

Give the teardrop time  
for sparrows to have faith in the sun.

Take your talismans,  
                  priests,  
                  amulets,  
                  thick beards  
                  and psalms

for the memory of tin  
to acquire the softness of water

The storm has come to an end  
The earth lifts an arm  
up to the sky.

In this mud there is desire.

## Solid Nights

The solid nights  
create a massive silence.  
Down fall the wings of the sun  
down fall the car bombs  
down fall the militias  
down fall the military patrols  
down fall the checkpoints  
down fall the dreamy, peaceful  
children's songs  
down fall the wives complaints about food rations  
down fall the parties  
down fall the absurd arguments about  
the government of National Unity  
down fall the electricity generators  
down falls the national electricity  
down fall the whispers  
down fall the hums  
down falls the climax of the little while  
down falls the human pottery  
and nothing remains  
but this silence  
reveling all around us.

## **New Beginning**

Take the roaring of the sea  
Take your star  
Take the dew-dappled archipelagos  
Take the planets  
Take the orbit  
Take the route.  
Take this mud  
Take small stones  
Take these pebbles.  
Take this land  
Take these palm trees  
Take this river  
and beware of the nomads.  
Beware of the nomads!  
Cleave your pomegranates  
and sprinkle their seeds on the sphere.  
Suckle the wind from a wanton breast  
Gather the clouds  
Shake their trunks.  
Call your herds  
Bring them together.  
Fall like fresh flowers  
on bitter mouths.  
Light the fire  
And  
Undress  
undress like this...  
Maybe what can't be can be.

## Orpheus' Mistake

O Orpheus,  
son of Calliope.  
You wanted to hum too much  
and tattoo your name  
on the wrist of your precious ruby

What says the cloud now?

.....

A woman betrayed you?  
You loved her  
and she dumped you for a rag merchant.

What rudeness

You set your frangible footsteps on the trail in the maze  
carrying your harp  
stroking its strings  
losing yourself in the tune.  
Your melodies scattered on the stones of the road.  
And at dawn you sneaked up like the wind  
searching for a neutral tulip  
and a sheer body.

Your look back killed you.

It's of no use to know now.  
It's of no use to look from above  
at the losing battle.  
The Maenads are waiting at the crossroad  
licking their fingers  
and nothing comes from behind the horizon  
except the sound of water.

**Assumptions**

For Galina...

we shall assume that  
when you come,  
you will come snow-white  
from the cortex of our days  
anointing our heads with water  
and granting our time more tenderness

we shall assume that  
the wind will unbutton its dress  
and rub its smooth skin  
with rose water  
and ambergris  
spilling the scent of the breeze  
upon our dark complexions

we shall assume that those who have returned  
will sift bygone times  
so that only the permanent  
that which heals the pangs  
of love and war  
remains.

we shall assume that when  
we tell the sea  
that its body  
is no good for  
flirtation  
or suckling,  
it will propose a truce  
with our old boats

we shall assume--just an assumption--  
that we'll sleep on the rooftops of our houses  
to cool off the summer heat  
that we'll wake to summer mornings  
fragrant with our mothers' bread

we shall assume that we'll see our fathers  
grow old before our eyes  
and that our sons will master their languages  
and we'll say "farewell"  
to our loved ones  
when they die.

we shall assume that we will fall in love with women  
as bashful as our neighbors  
or stroll at ease through unknown neighborhoods  
or get drunk in Baghdad or Basra taverns  
or light a candle in a church near Babul Muadham  
or pass through the gate of wishes at the imam's shrine  
so that the sky will sprinkle us with butterflies  
sparkling like the mirrors of his tomb.

or we'll mourn without fear  
with those who mourn Hussein  
to purify our souls  
to reopen the roads  
and bridge the gaps

we shall assume that we will  
rename all things  
to encourage the believers in the sun  
and women will change their night-black garb  
for brighter dresses

we shall assume that we will  
witness a rosy Euphrates sunrise  
the balance of light and darkness changing

we shall assume that you'll come

we shall assume that

please, don't let us ... like idiots

come!

Amen.

*Translated from the Arabic by the author*

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