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Writing Sample

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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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