



Poems by Kerem Durdag

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## Vapor

it is in the darkness  
where you melt away  
to thin vapors of silent  
misgivings only to fall  
back onto the bed,  
your skin now rain,  
your voice now a blue  
circular streak spiraling  
into the sky on my  
chest and to each other  
we say it is dark and  
harder to love

you sit up, part the  
curtain to let the moon  
see us in our shame  
the shame handed down  
to us, in so much dark  
with a single slit of light  
your back is cleaved  
into a chasm into which  
I could dive with a luggage  
of questions and a marble  
hand that finds yours

the breast moves in its  
shadow, my thighs rest  
into the old earth, where the  
grass is brown, the trees  
refuse to pick you up, and  
my shoulders bleed red only  
to become turquoise  
in that light where there is  
a glimmer of rescue I wait  
for my shoulders to turn  
violet so that if I can succeed  
in holding you I will blend  
into the rims of the chasm  
on the other side of which  
the breast is in its shadow  
your legs arc into a sword  
slicing my tongue all over  
the room in the dark

where there is sweat from  
the moans on the walls  
where eyes don't see  
ears hear more than they need  
to, there is no place  
to hide, and I don't know  
the time because my foot  
pulled the plug as part  
of my orgasm  
we are lost, we know it,  
the curtain drops on its knees

toppling over the moon  
smashing the light into a million  
shards, we scratch our envy  
for angels by singing songs of  
desperation, rebellion, kicking  
ass, kissing our children, anger,  
rest, in the grayness of  
hope my lips become a  
neck, fingers break on  
cliffs of hips  
I want to yell out so  
that the neighbors know  
what we are doing

doing it in a lick of silence  
breaking as foam on sands of  
screaming meditation, warriors  
belonging to no war, dancers begging  
on pedestals of broken statues for  
music of darkness & light, somewhere  
at the edge of the precipice and doubt  
I see resurrection of salvation  
of the blood of all the Jesus's on  
wooden crosses, hidden faces gaining  
shape on our breath, the tangle  
of our hair covering dreams of  
tomorrow, today has dissolved  
we have arrived at no  
destination, rescue is not  
at hand, our hands  
are holding onto arms bare  
with tire and smiles  
where horizon begins and ends,  
heaven crashes without  
a din and the devil apologizes  
for evil, over the vista  
of kisses and wandering on  
deserts that have long names

I tell her I love her  
as she nods.

## What gets to you at the end of the day

for Guzin Evren

We wash our dead and our hands  
melt into the water sliding off the  
world that is no more. And you &  
I are quiet. Above us our angels have  
deserted our prayers and I am asking you  
if I can fill your soul to the brim; where  
are all the dead going? If one day my  
blood will anoint the flesh of those  
who cry in their sleep, for kindness to  
my father, then I am yours to  
hold and kiss till I drop in exhaustion.  
I am turning around under the  
tornado of calm, making love to a  
woman whose past is coffee to me,  
hard and strong to forget. Somewhere  
under the lip of the nude horizon, I want  
to put my hand through your hair and  
say, my sister where will we rest.  
You will flame into laughter and  
remember on whose grave you held  
the earth of your dreams, that mist  
of rain in your soul which wets my  
shoulders. For all the dead and tears,  
we will kiss and wonder if we can  
go on till the end of the day,  
jumping into a kind of hurt which  
has a name: desire. There is  
blood on my hands Guzin, blood  
who some say drips into words  
for me. My eyes tell me how you  
faint for the people who have  
no blood left to give; that is the  
forest where your river meets my  
ocean and red becomes blue.  
The sick are screaming for you  
and I am running over people, over  
those slow bureaucrats, to hold  
them and say, my sister will  
save you. We are in a rush,  
leaving Karachi so far behind making  
it whimper into silence. So shall we  
go back? But you & I are in the  
business of salvation, we will save  
and not asked to be saved. Dust clogging  
our nostrils, these people are the  
dust from the clay that is now  
dry, but don't worry there is still  
water in our palms. Karachi is  
the knife that has gone through  
our rib cage - leave it there.

Across the whip burns of so many years  
I want to touch your skin. You  
and I are surrounded by corpses,  
it will be madness for us to become  
corpses too because when we were kids  
we said to each other, there is life  
in both of us. I want to hold your  
hand, raze down fatigue, shout  
to the idiots who rather forget us  
and pull you over to the sidewalk,  
away from the traffic and write  
on your spine, when our day ends  
the world would have found us at last.

It is midnight and clear on your  
chest. Raise your neck so I can see  
your profile in the light of a room  
where we lost our innocence without  
knowing or complaint. Outside Karachi  
hums and I am thinking of Ankara -  
there is death and flickering street  
lights; night is same everywhere.  
The question still remains: where  
will we rest? I know the answer, which  
I can tell you tomorrow at dawn.

## Magic for the blind

faith is a rambling love song which kills the wind in your lungs, makes you lunge for the absent glass of air, and all you can see are the traffic lights cutting your night into three, making you forget the string over the chasm you walk on; it is cruel and quick to jab, hasten to open the door & it leaves a fragrance of hate, of that yearning for longing, the blood on your shoulders carrying the dust from the graves of countless holocausts, a cry for help, a scream for blindness and faith is a numb corpse kissing you on your cheek, saying it is o.k. to be lost, it is o.k. to be forgiven, give us the guilt, take the sin, blow into the spirit and clay, lick the wounds, take the chair upon that I have bred my sweat and you see your children running away into the future, your mother and father cut down in a hail of bullets by the past, you are stuck here for good where your body is aching because you have crawled so many miles under so many skins wanting a sip of water, a touch of a careful hand, the slap of gentle & kind dream, you look and look, your eyes stab your skull into a million pieces and bombs burst like napalm on paper under your scalp, you want to help, you want to belong, you want to grasp the meaning painting your soul black & gray, freedom is carved onto your chest but it disappears in the morning, dampness grows under your nostrils with your breath not your own but that of the devil's, so this is the crush, the crack of bones, the splintering of nails of iron and flesh, the breaking of the teeth, the loss of love, you are ready for the city, for the streets of shame, for the hustle bustle, rattle & hum, for suspicion and detonation, for the meager ration demanding desperation, there is the rape of frustration together in a mist carrying compassion welded to your forehead but the needle of that compass is not even pointing to your legs, the darkness of hope, that is it, what you have wanted to say, the darkness of hope, you come out of the room dreaming the elevator door is opening & closing by itself, the elevator is full of buckets filled with words, alphabets, letters, nuances, space of chances, satisfaction, your heart is somewhere else, not in between the cracks of falsity of your own face, there is the betrayal of the dream, the elevator now works, the door is shut, locked out now your voice refuses to sing, where is the subway to hell? hold on for the last dance, hold on to the real wings of desire, angels becoming human & gods from your confusion of clarity flying into solid walls of your other desires, sky is collapsing into the dirt, split like peas your ground is no more, fly, fly till you break into a million glances of hunger, of the tortures of the mind, rip your lungs for her, for him, for the child whom you want back, break, break, crash & foam over the oceans of disappointment, wash your mouth with lust & sin, early, it is still early, hold on to the hand, hold on to me, swim till you drown & monuments crumble on the mention of your deeds & the dead, bleed, bleed for laughter and for the heaven that is no more, hell is on us and you have to laugh, enter to the known to grab the unknown that is the motto of lunatics, swallow the hurt my friend, cry the tears which you never shed, for the water in your veins you never freed, scream for the justice of your soul without the damn lawyers, damn the damnation, rumble till there is no light for you in the way, till the darkness swallows itself for your love, till the bed is soiled and wet, the battle was never won & the war was never started, cannons and machine guns melted to iron ore in your flames, leave, leave, close the gap over the chasm, chasm, ride the waves on the spirits of horses over the plains, tell me if you fall, fall, fall for the sake of Adam & revenge, all this is a lie, ask the mirror, ask the charlatan & the trickster & the lunatic behind the bars of the cage you carry under your ribs, breathe, sing and breathe, spin and turn for the nausea, ask the wind to cure the sickness of the world, hallelujah for the sake of our lives, hallelujah, continue on, leave the darkness behind, look, look at the rain of rains, it is time to remember the memories letting the banner for the disappeared to wrap itself around your skin, your hands are clean, let go of the whispers, the moans & groans, the dogs bark for some redemption, go join them with your feet carrying the cross for salvation, see the mountaintop, the mountaintop will never smell your want, color the sidewalks with demands, for the release of truth to release us from the bondage of doubts, can you not see the silence of the silent, can you not see the gags to withhold the electric shocks to teach you obedience, release, release yourself in this fight, this absent war, this love, this sin, this tear, this flesh, for liberation, for liberation to dive through the glass windows erected by the bastards who speak in our tongue, spin out the stories as if the cotton was being born from your womb, from the center of your gut I see you collapsing into a whorl, into arms to lift me up to smile at the faces of myself, of my other enemies, slap me and you will tear the fabric of your comfort, of the suburbia poisoning you, poison flowing into the river, you & I will have to drink the poison for reason we will never know, we, we, can you explain how the honey of words drips down our lips, dripping down to die & be born again in a puddle of warm certainty, rest, rest so that the wanderer floats by without you saying goodbye slashing a tragedy or a comedy in blue ink, in blue ink



that never ends, you will never end, hiccuping your search for a search leading to a road knowing the eternal cycle, the trap, the trap, the release for your life under a tree sipping old tea, the tricks of meditation, the guiles of your own circumlocution, perhaps you are bereft beyond resolution welcoming a suicide, an excused suicide, can you hear me? can I hear you, you & I are disjointed, on our sliced knees bowed down in echoes of how much more, how much more, and we might punch through suffocation, twist ourselves out of a choking, someone will light our way for a price and denude us all, there will be a need for you and me, to mix our ashes to rise in flames we will never see, final acts of martyrdom standing on the edge of a windy precipice screaming, screaming over voices to the great void, we are here, we are here, the violins tearing itself into chords sticking to our hair, this is a marriage till the clouds fall of the end of the world, slipping, slipping further down a slide such are the thorns of love and hate and no balm will heal the bruises or remove the hurricanes from our eyes; so ask me about faith

I say there will be sorrow  
so ask me about faith  
I plead there are poets who want to be rescued  
so ask me about faith  
I struggle I can't tell you  
so ask me again, again and again  
I whisper wrap your arms around the dead  
so cry to me faith, faith and faith  
and I voice to all forgive the living  
you are free and chained to the world.

## Rush

for Bill Varner

I can see Brahms beckoning,  
handing me the violin and saying,  
go ahead, you know how to play.  
It is dark, just about evening  
outside the window, all the oceans  
jumping over stone walls to catch  
a sensation of smooth flesh  
of a woman running to a house  
with one light on and a man  
with a flaming orange sun tattooed  
on his left arm shouting to the  
sky through a hole in the roof,  
where is the sliver from the words  
chiseled onto the school blackboards.  
In the air, the heat from the  
glowing "release yourself" neon sign  
burns a dove with chains on your  
scalp and you start to think  
if you will ever die peacefully, having  
had great sex the night before and  
spent everything you ever earned  
on ice-cream for the children  
in every ghetto and shanty town  
in this world the night before that,  
in the dive to part the earth  
into good and good, swallowing

the evil, the devils, the hells using  
your tongue of fantasy, pushing  
huge monsters with scepters on  
glorious horses back into the  
folds of your towel which is wet  
from the leaking tear duct on  
the side of your pen, saturated  
so that a puddle is near the  
wash basin where your child  
will splash insanity, pain and  
forgiveness all over your legs  
while you are shaving and  
all the gremlins in your head who are  
poets through a 30 day guaranteed  
mail order "Become a Poet and  
Give Revelation" catalog are  
whispering to your ear,  
howl loud and hard before collapsing  
into the arms of your blue mother and  
red father, and sink under the licks  
of the first woman you ever made love to

on a night when you saw Brahms and  
yourself (with a harmonica) at the edge  
of the horizon, far away from  
your grave on the dry bickering grass plains of  
Pennsylvania.

## History

There is a nameless history in all of us.  
It climbs up our vertebrae and  
snips off our nerves one by one till  
we are old with hate and ash  
under flames born of loud petitions for suicide.  
So I ask for a call of need from you  
so tell me my history is a bubble  
of dreams, that it is a temple  
where we all crawl to, tell me  
where somebody stamped my  
history on my veins, tattooed there  
till eternity eats my bones.

If I call for help can you believe me  
when I say to you that I want a  
divorce from my history. Let it  
breathe on its own and see how  
hard it is to grow senile and suspicious  
all alone. Separation breeds fear and  
fear pisses forgiveness; no generation  
bows down to history and I belong  
to no generation. Tell me, am I slave to history?  
I am lost in this traffic in the middle of  
Saddar and Empress Market, the cops have left us  
for accidental death and all the drivers are  
waiting for an excuse to jump into  
the fray. History is no longer hanging  
from the sky all red but green -  
go Kerem, go, you are a slave,  
but a free one. I can't see my hands  
in front of my face, there is the darkness  
of the evil I call hate and I am tired  
of driving for so many hours.

With all the tumult of the years  
I am in silence, history sitting beside  
on the torn, cheap brown leather seat,  
eyes down, nose twitching in  
nervousness. So who shall break first?  
Such is the cruelty of the universe  
where the choice is either to kiss  
your enemy or to kiss your soul, both  
ending in death and desire. I would  
like to teach it to cry so that when  
I demand a second chance it can cry  
with me in its helplessness. We wait  
till Dante comes and tell is that  
hell has frozen over and the Devil  
looks cute with a wool sweater.  
Kerem and history laugh, once again they  
are children who don't know where  
their parents will leave them forever.  
We are still laughing. Our hands are  
sleeping in each others flesh and  
we know we can never talk to each other;

we don't have a common language.  
But neither talking nor language  
did both of us any good. I kiss her  
and for now that is all what matters in order to live.

There is a nameless history in all of us.  
We are in search of a light which  
will show us the stillness of our loves  
and the restlessness of wanton singing.  
If there is a way for us to trod on  
then it is nowhere in the screaming wails  
of history or the torn fingers  
of my hands slashed by the blades  
of tomorrow. Black & white  
trickle down our necks, grunts  
collect cups painted ultraviolet,  
were are the strings of woven  
whispers and soft voices that  
bind us. All alone in blindness,  
forsaken by streets on which we  
licked off pieces of desperation and  
hope, there is a call in the closed  
room somewhere stuck under the  
miasma of our hearts, to catch fire and choke on the time  
that is yet ours to own.

Is it belief or faith,  
to see that one day time will run out

but we will no longer be scared  
to jump into the transparent water

of trust, forget, & crumbling peace,  
slipping into each other, each other,

for today and tomorrow I yell this:  
tell me my history and I will tell you yours.

## Veil

Water is covering me up under her belly  
and we both know there is no point in  
struggling. I let go of my oar, unlocked the  
buckles of my lifejacket, slipped under  
the waves that tell stories of heroes and  
mermaids in a cacophony of voices and  
choruses. I killed yesterday, did not  
wash the smear of lies from my arms,  
dreaming there is nothing such as confession  
or morality. It is a slow descent into hell,  
this state of mind where the flesh  
of the woman you love fails to  
redeem you or the guarantee of  
another tomorrow can not feed your  
hunger of a thousand quiet suicides.  
The thought of trying to work no longer  
distracts you, our hearts are pumping  
blood without caring about the whys,  
if we fall we are not worried about  
getting caught. Our souls are  
cocooned in veils. Black veils  
without lace or hint of silk in the  
fabric. Heat, hot warm humid  
air weighed by carbon dioxide crawls  
up your chest. You heave once, maybe  
twice. You see the words you might  
have spoken, the life you might have had.  
Then the water rises, takes you and you are no more.

## Lamb

Sacrifice me. Melt my lamb skin on your  
flames and don't ask me to say  
any last goodbyes. I am sick of it  
all this is the only solution.  
Revelations are outdated, romantics  
have been slaughtered, artists  
have licked away their fingerprints,  
days whirling into a loss of love,  
distended bellies satiated on  
resignation, masters of war  
fucking and fucking and fucking  
over the wheezes of our souls,  
the protection has collapsed,  
the music of escape and illusion  
torn into chords of red and  
blue, it is a dive into a pool  
only one foot deep, where will  
it all end, will our consciences  
be saved, who will be left to  
fight the eternal sleep, tell me,  
tell me, tell me, darkneses  
and evils are barking at our  
heels, shit, everything is going  
to shit. Sacrifice me, there is  
no other way. Sacrifice me.

## Hoofs

Hoofs are behind me, rushing  
over the warm earth that  
bore my fathers blood in shame.  
Manes are flying as if hands  
were being cut off and spread over  
the graves of the runners of heaven,  
in place of prayers on my back,  
there is a trail of dirt, dividing  
my life into two, with a knife  
which plows furrows of death  
and laughter across the love  
which you & I thought we had.  
In the disappointment of  
finding a loss of purpose in our  
dreams, you & I will have to  
walk, plod, crawl through the mud  
born from the hard rain  
of last night and get to the  
horses when they are sleeping  
and steal their hoofs. And  
then we will gallop over each other.

## Photocopy man

I still don't know his name. So  
long this man has copied the  
needs of my academic endeavors  
and I still don't know his name.  
He once said he has no interest  
in migrating to America because  
one heart and soul belong to a  
land which is his. When I was  
fourteen he had a photocopy  
machine at the side of Kehkeshan Shopping Plaza,  
and with a smile which reminded me of an  
angel who refused to believe in the  
immortality of the devil, he made copies.  
Kehkeshan Shopping Plaza is gone but  
he is still here, in a small shop but now with two assistants.  
Eight years of copying and the man shook  
my hand when I was home last time, reminiscing  
about the previous years. I ordered three copies of  
my play from him. A matter of habit, a matter  
of grabbing onto of what has gone by. The  
copies were spotty but I didn't care which is the way it should be.



## Dune

In the darkness behind the closed  
eyelids, I can see dunes which undulated  
into the palms of women who have  
forsaken their breasts, shut away  
the dirt that is now caked on their  
thighs, who have killed their wombs.  
Wind in softly blowing the desert  
snake promises of a cooler day  
and voices of men who are whispering  
victories of war with their boots  
ankle deep in the sand which is  
not hiding the bones of prophets  
who failed their followers. I can  
smell the flowers at the feet of  
the dunes planted by lovers  
who do not know what rape  
means, or the stench of animals  
who sniff around carcasses  
snickering at the vultures above.  
Beyond the vultures are stars  
wheezing a faint light and I can  
see speckled shadows slip and slide  
on the dunes. Towards the coming of  
dawn I try to find tracks but there  
are none. And in my yearn for revenge  
I shed no rain for the dunes.

## Ghost

You sit at the front end of the bus, the one that drops you off at exactly the same stop at 8:40 in the morning. I know you are retarded, that the river in your veins has melted to ore. I also know you will not realize that when you kill a fly, there is nothing in your soul which makes you think about the collection of wings you have in a jar in your pocket. You have forgiven us for our sins and I look at you not knowing what to do. If I knew your name I would have asked you a couple of questions and said I will not allow you to fade into the stones of our cities. You are the purest of us all, one who has taken the ore, held it with his naked hands and cooled it into a kiss of peace and loneliness. There is a song inside you, give it to me. I am hungry for your ore. I want to know your name.

## Othello

The next morning in school choir  
I was sleepy; I had tried  
to be Othello but could not because it was getting late.  
Darkness in the stairs, the salty sea,  
shadows slowly slipping into the  
heat, voice of Orson Welles,  
the next morning was not welcome.  
Black and white movie covering  
my face, I wanted to kiss  
Desdemona. Fell asleep,  
and was in choir the  
next morning. Desdemona  
can I kiss you after school?

Again it is next morning and  
I don't get up. Desdemona is  
dead and my kiss is drying on  
my lips. Othello, my dear friend,  
such cruelty does not do us  
justice. I hear your voice and  
remember that it rings of Orson  
Welles. I don't understand you,  
I don't understand me. Iago  
I understand, but I can never remember him.

Twenty three now, I waited  
twelve years for the end  
of Othello. So long for the  
quietness in Cyprus to sink  
in. If this is an attempt at  
bridging years I have failed,  
I miss the next morning in the choir  
and the old t.v. where I saw  
a man, Othello. And look  
at me now - Othello has  
finished his travels, the old t.v.  
withered away, my flesh  
is not black and white and  
Desdemona did not die in my arms.

## whisper me a moan

whisper me a moan  
and I will give you your name,  
slide over me, pick up the  
layer of dirt of fears, the flakes  
of lies, set me free, tell me  
there is a heaven beyond the  
doors of hell, that the night  
will end tomorrow, our stories  
promised to become tales for the  
ages, come on whisper me a  
moan, there is a want of wind,  
a desire for quiet days rain,  
fall on the bed which belongs  
to all our past lovers and  
don't ask me if I will cry when you  
leave, grant me a wish and  
let me kiss your breast which  
holds the fire stolen from the  
world, if we are thieves then  
say so I am I still waiting doe destiny  
to come and knife me, sweet  
suicide where the line is thin,  
sight blurred and sacrifice done  
for free, there are whispers, there  
are moans, give me both and  
I will give you your name.

## **This train**

I want to run after this train  
which never stops  
just like in the good days  
under the Clifton Bridge  
on the way to Usama's  
house, where the  
smoke clogged my lungs,  
the air smelt of forgotten  
streets and the slums  
rested on blind regrets. There  
was innocence then,  
the train struggling to  
keep a schedule and I  
was going to Usama's to  
forget all my schedules,  
to look at the magazines.

I saw my father smile in  
a dream I had yesterday. And  
in the dream there was the  
train once again. I am running  
after father and train,  
not willing to stop, not yet  
ready to cry.

## Yelda

I wanted to dance with her.  
Yelda, Yelda, Yelda, my head  
was screaming to my heart  
and my mouth was silent

preoccupied watching her eyes  
dreaming of touching her hands  
visions of love and commitment  
creating skies where all doors would open

walking in quiet restlessness  
I wonder what my mother saw  
her son smiling over sunsets and sunrises  
twelve years old and contentment on his face

the music was in my blood  
future conversation penned down for practice  
where is the room for sadness  
for her departure without goodbyes

I am now thinking how she is doing  
if my name is screaming inside her head  
whether the smell of childhood is at her nostrils  
because I will die and I want her to remember me

## My Hawkesbay

The man drowned in front of me.  
My father rushes into the waves  
and my mother prayed to God but  
he slipped through my fathers hands and  
my mothers prayers, the man I mean.  
He waved to me in death, and today  
I am cursing for not waving back.

It is the waves at Hawkesbay beach.  
Waves which carry so much salt that  
brick huts crumble into sand, washing  
back to the bottom of the sea together  
with remembrances of souls lost  
and won. When I was sixteen my  
father told us that he had sold our hut,  
that the sea was dangerous and besides,  
all our friends we went with  
had left Karachi.

But before the hut was sold it imploded.  
The last time I went to Hawkesbay I said  
goodbye to the sand with crab bones and  
sunsets with camel imprints. I still have  
the photographs taken with an  
eye for the future - grainy and underexposed.  
Photographs which my father took  
are better. Black & white  
without a mystery. Smile on  
his face and mothers head scarf  
is blowing in the ocean breeze;  
days when the water was blue to me  
and nothing more. Does the sand remember  
all the miles I ran as a fallen angel  
or the thoughts I put down for  
the tides to erase as a failed devil?  
All the drowning, in  
front of me and inside,  
the people drifting by and I am trying to catch them now.  
All I have to show for it is a rotting  
sea shell collection and a  
tattoo in my arm of flames and water.

I need to go back to Hawkesbay,  
find the hut, ask my father  
a couple of questions, kiss my mother, and  
show my sister where I ran  
and became child of the sea.

## Heroes for a day

Wet prayers kissing my hair  
making it belong to a noir guy  
in a classic black & white movie,  
I am thinking of her  
of how she is waiting to hold  
to hold onto herself  
but those wet prayers make  
skin slippery;  
Coltrane does not care and  
his sax drips the colors of  
lost loves which hide  
under chairs at  
bare rooms belonging to  
good poets, bad heroes,  
those who kiss only with  
their lips, drive with a  
cigarette and foot on the gas,  
and have jokes rejected by  
forlorn comic in hell  
such melodrama waters my  
blood, so what? I'm still  
thinking of her and how I  
can kiss her better than  
a whole lot of heroes put  
together. somewhere in the  
coolness and wetness of the hero lies  
a prayer (perhaps for Coltrane)  
that we just have to continue on  
till our feet are awash  
with the wet green grass growing  
from the bellies of those  
we forgot to remember at the  
end of the day  
the end of the day when  
rain and prayers rest to breathe,  
Coltrane sits on his chair  
wondering where love is lost,  
and I am searching for  
the hero who will carry tomorrow

tomorrow tomorrow tomorrow  
echoes who desire forgiveness  
and to to be held by the shoulders  
I did both  
she asked me to  
we are all heroes for a day.



## Gaziantep and Edremit

In Gaziantep there are not  
many mountains, my mother  
never mentioned  
this absence but it shows  
on her face  
now, my father, once  
told me there was a good  
size mountain in Edremit  
named Durdag on the  
slopes of which were partridges  
people shot for fun,  
little stones with strands  
of torn feathers I saw under  
his nails. In the middle  
of dry stone land is this  
Gaziantep looking at the  
sky searching for an ocean  
to bend over. Far away  
there is this Edremit, mountain  
and ocean together asking  
passerby where is a bluer sky  
to own. Some say folk tales  
never end, they are just forgotten.  
I have not forgotten this one and  
it hasn't ended:  
a dervish with a loud voice  
and black eyes gave  
light to Gaziantep and Edremit  
to see each other in the twilight,  
in return they passed on  
their souls and words when  
they gave up looking at the  
sky, gave up standing as mountains  
at the edge of restless water;  
today this dervish  
is lost from sight but  
you will recognize him  
because he is the man in the roadside cafe  
eating a lots of nuts and black olive and drinking cranberry juice.

## The mountain

Luiz, my friend with the  
bad back, always talked  
about climbing the mountain.  
Martin Luther King saw one  
and died in return.  
I will be leaving in the morning  
and I am not sure what I  
will be climbing.  
All I can say is that the  
view will be great,  
the breeze will feel good on  
my cheeks, the smooth  
rock will give rest to my  
frame and if I remember  
I will utter one or two private  
prayers. Then, in a fit of craziness  
I will run  
down hollering revelations  
only understood by me and  
other lunatics.  
like Luiz and King.  
It is one of those things friends,  
either you live it or you don't.

## State of grace

Nagasaki blew up into an eye,  
Auschwitz melted into the  
chamber of forgetfulness,  
Bosnia splintered as bone  
fragments all over the television,  
Vietnam blazed and disappeared  
among the blood green of forests,  
mothers wandered among the  
footsteps of their sons and daughters  
in Buenos Aires, mud covered  
souls with names in El Salvador,  
bullets pierced crossed in Belfast,  
children had prayers frozen  
on their lips in Guatemala,  
car tires melted on  
necks beside the asphalt of  
Johannesburg, red hands crawled  
onto barbed wires in Soweto,  
shopkeepers moaned for a revenging  
God in Karachi and Bombay,  
meditations evaporated into drops  
of clear rain in Tibet, walls  
wept sweat, madness and loudness  
in Diyarbakir, in Los Angeles,  
in London, in Cairo, in the  
dreams of yesterday and tomorrow

I say no more  
no more my people  
to this state of grace.

## Hold that

You want to hold onto the  
last drop of water  
to the last word which  
will remind you that  
your father will reappear  
in empty doorways  
and you will want to see  
your mothers dancing eyes  
in those of your wife's  
it is that sliver of the  
sky stuck at the tip of  
your finger asking you  
where did we all lose  
belief, when did we  
refuse to go to sleep alone  
and the answer is not  
echoing in your head  
you are not at the verge  
of sliding on orange  
skins to smell different  
from yesterday, from the  
tomorrow you see rushing  
towards your lower back  
from the corner of your glass  
eye, where unknown to you  
your grandchildren are  
wondering who cried so long ago

## Distances

Distances are being left behind,  
the tea sitting still reflecting  
a last shimmer of my face  
before I leave; and I can't  
drink it. There is a bend in my  
stance, it is not the weight of the world  
but the breeze whooshing and slamming  
into me as I grasp a door handle  
and realize I am a day older.  
Outside, so many have forgotten me  
while I simply can't let go,  
spreading ink over paper woven  
out of restless mumblings in  
a corner of my tongue where  
streets skip rope, houses clap  
when electricity is rationed, poles  
whisper, rebellious water is sold to  
the rich as water, and with the  
ink memories slapped with worries  
soldered into chains with quietness  
and sadness spread over my legs.

Distances are being left behind  
by me in this dark; the shops  
have shut down, infants have  
graduated, friends married to  
those you once wanted to kiss,  
distances from strains of  
forever, eternity, always,  
those chimes melting to a  
drizzle lightly as I ride on  
my bike, pedaling towards  
a prayer I know, a redemption and  
forgiveness I will never see,  
the wheels under me cutting the dark  
into packets of love and loss, my mouth  
wishing for fire and flame,  
to be licked slowly as I grunt into a  
headwind and say, the darkness,  
love and I will end  
at the end of the sleepless ride.

Darkness is being left behind,  
hiding and giggling around trees,  
whose leaves crunch under your weight,  
the weight of separation and disjointment  
piling on top of my belly as the years  
and stories without an  
audience continue on.

### Yeah, Mrs. Lobo

We are in a circle, on a stage and  
Mrs. Lobo is trying to teach us how to sing  
and dance at the same time. Boys and girls  
are holding hands, wondering if this  
really was a good way to get out of class.  
We are all nervous. Old enough to realize  
we will never hold hands like this ever again,  
young enough to dream of loving  
as simply squeezing a grasped hand,  
we are caught in a cycle of music,  
dance, wanton risk taking. On my left is  
Tushna Dubash, on my right Nargis Chinoy  
and I am squeezing both their hands. They complain,  
I plead innocence, and pirouet for them  
as a gesture of approaching manhood, lost  
knowledge of women, flirtation and time.  
I knew then, there was a meaning in  
all this, this dance on an elevated platform  
where the music is good but old, voices are  
melodious but off key, steps are  
strong but out of step, there is, I know,  
meaning in Tushna asking me to shutup,  
Nargis shyly berating me, you idiot, you fool,  
and I am laughing, laughing for  
this place and time which belongs  
to us. I have no amnesia. I remember  
the newness of their flesh, the lines  
on their palms still undredged.  
I remember everything. It is  
late morning, the dew is lost,  
our whole lives ahead of us,  
there is no death, and in my left  
I am holding Tushna,  
in my right I am grasping Nargis.  
And we are slaves to Mrs. Lobo's  
music and dance instructions.

## Chant

There is a tangle in our minds,  
for the soul who departed without  
a question or two,  
angels in skies under our feet  
we tell you, the search is full of noises.

Some angels tells us the morning will not be  
a surprise, that love will crash  
and burn on the windshields of our  
cars, but we tell you, we will go on.

Sometimes, burnt out ghettos and  
descending darkness slaps anger on  
our faces, revelations dry up from our  
reservoirs, so we tell you, we are suckling on poverty and hunger.

From the darkness we slit open a womb  
of light, and scrap magic and chants  
from city walls, calling spirits and lazy  
gods to heed our call, we tell you, loudness is not a curse.

Perhaps we are living our lives over and over again,  
without knowing it, the cities and  
everything and everybody in it collapsing into  
the residue of the hate and grace left  
for each death and birth, our childhood  
and senility photographed and then faded  
for purposes of forgetfulness, nostalgia and conversation.

## Stormtrooper

I wonder what is going to come next.  
Standing at the edge of the storm  
behind the dunes, I wonder if  
death will come easy, if I will  
have to look at Mary and have  
to say, sorry for leaving before you.  
There is soft sand within the  
storm, who will go in and bring  
back the grain on which is  
written "Allah", it is I  
who says yes. Must be Mary's voice  
beckoning, ramming into wandering  
ghosts which makes it harder  
then it should be. I had asked  
for guidance last night; this  
morning I remembered that  
Gabriel for his last wish asked  
for my birth and the heavens  
sighed dreams in relief. To  
palm that grain is my fate  
and too love Mary is too.  
I want to smile at this unfair  
war. I tell to Gabriel's ear, we will  
all be reborn on demand. And Mary,  
rest easy, your love will bring me back.



## Pathfinder

Ahead there is a path for me.  
No forks, no turns; this one is  
mine. There is a smell of rusted  
car frames on the trees, the roots  
of which are wrapped by old  
newspapers declaring more people  
are going to die tomorrow. Gravel and  
sand are compacted at  
some parts of the path, and at  
time there is cracked asphalt  
with pools of shit and soap  
water. Heat, sweat, swarming  
words, western fashions, music from  
car speakers mouth their  
seductions at me. At the roof  
of the sky is a cinematic footage  
of me saying goodbye to my father,  
my friend Luiz, my people. I can't  
see what is at the end, but  
I hear a distant ruckus, a  
tumult of lives, he clang  
of power and powerlessness, and  
a soft slurping lick of contentment,  
this path is mine.

### Pathfinder on the border of New Mexico

Ahead there is a path for you.  
Crazy rocking wind, a burning sun  
at every angle, hard ground where  
your bare feet will give way to  
knees, and on the left is a river  
which has an ancient Indian  
name, which means road to nowhere.  
Everyday, you are on this path, craving  
for t.v. and fantasy will slow you down,  
silent red water will  
blotch your shirt, the partner of your  
life will ask to you to let go, plans  
for reincarnation will go awry for  
the lack of an urn, and all the  
questions you ask will have a  
clear answer. You will forget  
that time in New Mexico is a  
lizard with its tail independent from  
its head; so you will grow  
old but your memories will  
leap and belong to others,  
and keep coming back. There will be  
no chance for goodbyes  
or a real banging-good life,  
just regrets and more  
thoughts on what all this really means.  
This path is yours.

## Whirlwind

for Irem Durdag

I know you will never forgive your father,  
so don't butcher me with your vengeance.  
Over the edge of our apartment's balcony, beyond  
the high tension cables, you will see those  
mornings when you & I knew we were  
angels on a mission, that we became  
life's rebels and romantics not for love  
but for screaming love. Between those heavy  
eyebrows waves of the Indus kiss the visions  
which you inherited from the nameless,  
invisible plains of Anatolia, and in  
your hands and feet, squeezed in the  
crevasse of every bone and muscle, you  
bathe in the meaning of your name.

And you will end one day when your  
anger has melted into our sins. You  
wander through bullets made of gold,  
on highways with traffic so dense,  
even prophets refuse to part the flow.  
Yesterday, when the frustrations of  
living exploded in those veins carrying  
jasmine and fire, your tears drilled  
a hole in the floor and blossomed  
into a garden with forbidden fruits  
at the center of the earth. Today,  
you are telling me you did not cry,  
that the hole is from your stomping  
on the idiots who refuse to free the  
people from the cages, those people who  
knife you in the back simply  
because you will not lie.

Tomorrow you & I will both have  
to lie because we have fallen.  
Across the broken walls in our apartment  
compound you will never laugh when our  
footprints disappear as they reach  
the ocean. Some say they have seen us  
walk on the water, dancing to  
some music only known to us  
and other closet lunatics.

Did you see the whirlwind outside  
your window which does not have a  
mosquito screen? Remember,  
we will not even have graves  
to rest in. Don't worry, your  
hates and doubts will roll up  
as strands onto the whirlwind and  
then Irem, paradise and hell  
will detonate in your soul.

## **Eve come back to me**

There is a hollering resonating from the  
souls of people this morning. On the darkening  
twilight of blue, spray painted on the face of  
Eve, tonight, the hollering will  
swim to the back of my mouth, and  
cleanse the vocal cords. One whole day, the  
hollering will float on the wind born from  
the dance of the ghost warriors on a hilltop  
on the nation of Sioux, where the fire  
can be held in the hand, visions from  
medicine men can be taken without prescription.  
and where even I can run on the old grass  
at Wounded Knee with Thunderheart and  
Red Fish. I will have to wonder if Eve  
is there somewhere too, hiding behind  
the shadows of the buffaloes, or under  
wings of hawk, or blanketed and camouflaged  
by the eyelids that belong to the moon.  
Maybe she is not hiding and is carried as  
notes of sadness, betrayal and discontent on  
the hollerings, which now at midnight are silent.  
My veins are awash with dreams  
laced with chants, and the memory of  
Eve dissolves my blood and nerves  
like acid. I belong to Eve. My name is not Adam  
and it has been so long since  
I shed tears from helplessness and wisdom.

## My harmonica

I palm my harmonic  
and blow life into it  
I am a god is dispute  
and my harmonica is  
clay who will be human  
and music, a hybrid  
of two races  
fated to drink the  
water of sadness and  
glory of each others  
births and deaths  
I blow want, desire  
and salvation  
redemption without receipt  
for eternity or remembrances  
of me, which ever is last;  
sons and daughters who  
will see clay is left over  
pieces of a supernova  
in the expense of our  
minds and limitations of our  
hearts, the disappearances  
of noises from the hoofs  
of horses who rode not bothering  
me anymore because I will  
recreate all, ask the harmonica  
and you will know why and when

## **We are prophets**

My dear woman, we are prophets  
of life, unacknowledged and  
unappreciated, carriers of the  
holy word, the forgotten prayer,  
the neglected hold of the hand.  
We bleed the regrets for the years lost,  
cut ourselves in request for perpetual  
silence from the hum drum of the  
pursuit of excellence, service and  
client satisfaction in the workplace.  
We sing songs, utter unintelligible grunts  
and speak for the empowerment of the deaf,  
making movies about what is true and  
real for the blind is our paen, and  
release from shackles of our past  
mothers and fathers our job. We drink the  
saltwater from the ocean because  
we can and can soothe the  
wounds of the soldiers on the roads  
with dirt because we want to.  
Lost on forbidden journeys, we have  
been tortured by smiling demons for  
trying to cross the boundary between the  
divine and the not-divine. We are naked  
for our clothes mask us and we eat  
stardust for our only meal. O yes, my dear  
woman, no doubt we are prophets of life.

### Imagine, I say to myself

Imagine, I say to myself, what would it  
be like to marry this woman who  
is lying on my legs, asking the elves  
in her mind to forget her past love.  
I had her open forehead last  
minute, then looked at the right  
canopy above my head, trying to follow  
two wisps of clouds drag and slide like  
a desert snake across the dunes  
of stars, one of which I thought was  
an airliner carrying a bunch  
of lovers like myself. I want to  
tell her I will not see her for a  
while simply because I have to  
go to heaven to sort some things  
out, but I say to myself, imagine,  
what if she looks right through  
you like Superwoman and finds  
a heart missing in your chest. In front  
of me is this lighthouse blinking,  
thinking it is a tired dragon,  
weary of battling knights, princes and  
the damn ocean. Imagine, I say to myself,  
when you marry her what just blazed through your  
spine, that you will both die at the  
same time and have your ashes float on open water.

## Blade Runner

Spiral down the stairs without a bend  
fall on marbles of sweet sugar  
crunch on the chocolate night  
envelope two souls till morning  
it is 11:47 on the red digital readout  
tell me what are the secrets you  
have given up forever  
what is the price of this loss  
that you will never tell your children,  
I am you and you are no longer  
mine, strands of your hair  
sprawled with your legs over my  
nipples, my belly button lying  
in a pool of moans, flights  
of blades running down my neck,  
if there is a tomorrow I don't care,  
there is a light in front of me,  
tell me are we forever  
can we stand at the gate to love  
blast the music of my life into my ears  
allow me to drop misgivings into your eyes,  
yeah, we are the judges of the world,  
acrobats without a safety net,  
baby, we are dangerous  
but needed  
just like our orgasms



## Hurl

It is your laugh today which makes your  
mind stretch from one wall to another,  
and in between is a ravine of old, proud  
trees hiding a river who water is so  
fresh, you are guaranteed resurrection.  
You are climbing a mountain, stepping  
on this damping earth, from which  
rises the fragrance of your teenage years  
where you were close to immortal  
and you hurled meaning as gifts  
for the rest of the senile world. The  
boots on your feet are trying to nudge  
for security on those rocks that  
have evolved into slippery mirrors, the moss  
reminding you of the touch of your  
mother, the voice of your father when  
he was a child at the same time as you were. Air  
at the summit is clear and thin, so clear and  
thin, your lungs inhale every empty gasp of dream you  
brought up here in your backpack, and it feels okay.  
Sounds of the hours at the dining table, sweating from your  
ass, listening to an old repeated lecture on goodness, life, politics  
and women is now thrown against the rocks, you see below  
the smallness of the house you talked to yourself  
and yet you want to tire more. The prospect of going  
back down fills your gut with apprehension but you  
have already decided to hurl yourself into the ravine  
where you the trees will catch you,  
the river will wash, feed and clothe you and  
once again, you will ask the location of the path to the top.

## Bounce

Distances scare me.  
They numb the thoughts  
in the frontal lobe of my head.  
Every time I think of distances  
I want to say masta espacio,  
repitar por favor, the heat  
of the day settles into the  
protected fences of my silent  
pleas, and the food I have  
cooked tastes hotter than usual.  
It is the fear of forgetting the  
phone number of people, or not  
having the time to remember the  
cause we believed in, which  
makes me hate distances. Someone  
should blow out another world  
and put all the separations in its atmosphere  
to breed itself over and over again  
far from us. That is the only way  
out. Electronic telecommunications, information  
exchange. bullshit! they don't bring the  
world any closer. Yesterday, Bob was  
rejected from grad school, is still working a  
half ass job at the city welfare office,  
and I am far away from him.  
That is why distances scare me.  
Closer to a subtle death and I wouldn't know about  
it till it was too late.

## Push

It is as simple as this:  
I am nearly twenty-four  
and there has been no revelation for me.  
Twenty-four years worth of nights  
have gone by and not one errant  
angel has crashed through the ceiling  
of my room and told me, it is time.  
There have been no lost prophets  
dressed in white on the streets  
or highways who would urge me to take  
over their burden. No messages  
on the water, no whispers when I  
am thirsty for sex, no calls for saints as I sing  
and wail, absolutely nothing from  
the offices above. There must be a  
grievance procedure. Perhaps a way  
to get hold of a revelation order  
catalog for young, blatantly loud  
idealists. It is a drive towards  
a legitimacy for all the visions under  
my tongue, for all those dreams  
sweating from my thighs. I want  
revelation to be a matter of choice,  
not antiquated legislation which requires  
me to part seas, die for all the idiots, and  
be more pious than necessary. Revelations  
don't change but the world is always the  
same. So are twenty-four year old poets  
like me. Let us have the revelation  
and get on with the rest of our lives.

## Miracle

There is a demand for miracles  
these days. Not like the olden  
days where they hovered at the  
edge of our nostrils to pick and  
choose the fragrance of each.  
Some say, miracles happen everyday  
which is similar to saying death is  
the extension of life: tough to  
swallow and an exercise in calculated  
fear. Perhaps they should be placed  
on the shelves of supermarkets where  
as the disenchanting, the yuppie, the  
tired and spent housewife, the hungry  
and soulless artist, can buy one.  
At the checkout line, the people will day dream  
the fulfillment of their wishes  
the moment they are on t.v. explaining  
the quickest way to acquire and sell  
miracles at a profit while at home  
gold will flow on streets, carnivals  
will take on as much new recruits as they can,  
and sex will be wet on many lips.  
Days bribing themselves to watch  
the night will become the norm, and  
murderers reciting prayers the rule.  
All this will be a miracle.  
The first one without the knowledge of God.

## Slipstream

On your way without the  
coffin handles to hand onto  
cliff and water spray brushing  
against the skin that has  
no soul to hold in, all the  
warnings for the trail of the  
devil goading you to enjoy  
the thrill lost over the  
crashing cymbals dropping with  
the rain as if people were  
hurling stones at your white face,  
the black of your eyes trying  
to suck in the dreams tucked  
under your pillow, graffiti proclaiming  
"Sarajevo and AIDS are the cling-clang  
of spirits fighting above" pass, whiz  
by, blow through your outstretched hands,  
the raft you set out torn  
to shreds on the rocks, your life  
jacket the only meager separation  
between perfection and ordinary accomplishment,  
the cars in the jammed traffic so  
far away they don't even want to remember you,  
the dropping waterfall is right ahead  
and the first line of the song for the  
fools of Zen goes inside your head,  
this is all the honey of injustice.

## Tribe

I belong to a tribe of mystics  
who dance in a circle whenever  
it is good to do so. We hold no communal  
meetings and neither do we chant. The  
cooking is done on a rotational basis and  
it is only at dinner when the tribe  
is gathered together. Astrology we  
don't understand, science bores us,  
art scares us and we don't talk  
because it is not necessary for us.  
We are all born knowing the future  
and remembering the past, so we  
dance when we realize we have  
no wisdom, no utterances, but vision  
and knowledge of the ends and beginnings.  
We can never sleep because the question  
of love your enemies bothers us and  
in the mornings it is our habit to laugh  
for the tragedies of the world. At dusk  
we cry because we know the tragedies yet live.  
Clothing is unnatural to us just as is  
worrying about the meaning of life.  
Our only religion is believing we are  
heaven and hell, and our only practical  
skill is the ability to become fire and  
water, when we desire. Living under  
the shade and grace of the banana tree  
leaves is our status quo and our passion  
is to dissolve into rainwater to escape from our  
hunters. We crave for ice-cream. Outsiders  
are most welcome to observe us. But please don't  
ask us about the future or the past.

## Blame

There has to be someone to blame  
for all the murders in the cities,  
the hunger residing in the stomachs, the  
dingy air floating in houses, the  
wars smelting across the concrete  
highway, the blood and screams  
of bones between four walls, there  
has to be someone to blame.  
Tea in my cup has become cold,  
all the loves on pieces of paper  
declared and appreciated (sometimes)  
are embossed onto the realities  
of art-like workaholic life, and  
there are more idiots worried which  
fashion they should don for social  
revelry; there has to be someone  
to blame. Inside the anger morphs  
into green gangrene, the  
hands start to seethe and boil,  
and feet roar their unstillness,  
but shoppers go on shopping,  
the t.v. goes on mumbling overworked and overcooked secrets  
and the people and things to blame  
melt away from the reach of our hold.  
No wonder the planet is over heating.  
It is getting to hot to live.  
We need to find someone to blame.  
We need to blame the right ones  
otherwise we will have to eat the  
'b', the 'l', the 'a', the 'm', and the 'e'  
and choke on it  
as a legacy for the future.

## Watermelon

Pink water dripping down my lips  
making me hear my father tell me  
sixteen years old you are still  
eating the watermelon without a fork or knife  
like a damn barbarian; and  
my mother is looking at me with  
her eyes saying, never mind him.

Seeds crunching under my teeth, I am  
their executioner, supreme commander  
of death, they live if they are big, slippery  
and hold the whisperings of my childhood,  
they die if they are small, afraid  
and whimpering and bemoaning their  
hard luck: the recurrence of eternal summer.

In Central Anatolia, masses sink spoons  
into red flesh, primal thrust into pleasure,  
soul and escape. I am there, right now.  
Eating the crust, my mother admonishing  
me, you are a goat, it will spoil your  
digestive system, eating all the regrets,  
the voices, the deaths and swallowing the water  
and watermelon and life.

Ah! this is the pinnacle of a glorious watermelon eater.  
To smash my face into a fruit  
leftover from the table of Dionysus  
and breathe in the water to become the  
living fish in an ocean of pink and crimson,  
a man wanting to kiss his father, mother and sister,  
and all he knows, and say, everything will be alright.



## Smoke

Whatever you brought from  
the aisle will tumble into  
the plastic bag from the  
hands of a woman you will  
never know. In this supermarket  
the stench of unfamiliarity hangs  
over your head as you start  
to think whether the children  
of this mother in front of you  
will ever climb out of the darkness  
they are swimming in. This  
woman old enough to kiss you  
on your forehead and give  
directions to you for the life  
yet to come outside the automatic  
doors, is breaking inside, praying  
when will my son walk proudly  
by a checkout line. My shoulders  
hunch, and I want to kneel  
in front of my mother, quietly  
saying I will find a way out.  
I look at her as her hands  
grace grocery items, washing the  
sins and guilts of sons who  
have forgotten their mothers.  
Her eyes don't bend,  
"Have a nice day" spills into my  
soul together with the blue evening  
canopy and all I can spit out is,  
"You too".

## Revolution

Nurse tell me why have you stuck  
an i.v. into my arm which says  
"revolution" on the label? Isn't  
it enough that my bones have been  
shattered by batons harder than the  
core of the dreams of children, isn't  
is enough for you to touch the  
bruises on my flesh where all  
the fucking principles I believed in gushed  
in torrents of weakness and blood?  
Soles of my feet can't carry this  
struggle anymore, knuckles in  
my hands can't grip a pencil to  
protest with anymore, my tongue  
has receded into silence after  
being electrocuted, and yet Nurse,  
Florence Nightingale of this soldier,  
this peasant of beliefs, you pump me  
with revolution into veins collapsing  
under your care. Tell  
my sister, I disappeared into memories  
just like the way the guru at the  
edge of the wall out on the road which  
goes by our apartment, said. Nurse,  
ask me if I am ready to receive  
messages from the millions who have  
overdosed on your i.v. Ask me, if I will forget  
your mistake for killing me.  
Nurse, hear me I say no.  
You should have given me an i.v. of peace.

## Rattle and Hum

for Hasan Zaidi

Hotel room in Providence, R.I. at the edge  
of America, and I am  
on my bed at Exelcesior Hotel in  
New York, six years ago, when you and I  
knew the taste of our lives. Six years,  
and on both nights the rattle of our  
childhood was, is, getting quieter,  
the hum inside our lungs gathering  
force, ready to be breathed forth  
when we check out in the  
morning and admit, we are scared  
but not conquered. Those tasty days  
of cricket and fantasy women,  
lap on shores of my bed, beckoning  
some kind of wild response which  
will demonstrate to our children  
and the women we love, that even  
rebels are human. America has  
licked me all over but I still crave  
for the din of our voices melting  
like iron ore into a Pakistan hat  
has wrapped its dust around our bodies.  
Outside, there is a haunting  
sense of calm, but inside Hasan,  
the crashes of steel, concrete and  
ink are tearing holes in the wallpaper  
lining this hotel. It is not easy to munch  
on the cluttering noise. My teeth hurt.  
It must be America, Hasan.  
It must be.

## Anarchy

"Tell you what man, everything is collapsing and wilting into chaos. Fuck, there are homeless children begging for food in every city, crime no longer makes us numb, and money has imprinted its color on our skins. Look around man, people are dying, women are wailing for good reason, jobs are evaporating quicker than the money I make being a cab driver, capitalist system my ass. The rent is due, my hunger is ringing louder for every hour that trickles by, and where the fuck are all the people who are supposed to be smart enough to solve humanity's problems. We have finally conquered ourselves, inherited our own suicide, God and hope can kiss my ass, fuck man! Where is the sense in all this? Hey, you say you are a poet, well write this, O dispenser of wisdom: we are all fucked. There is no tomorrow. We have drowned in our own sea of blood and screams for the last time." So said to me this man who drove me from JFK Airport to La Guardia.

## Solace

At the end of it all, you don't want the day to hurt anymore. You want the sun to sink into the depths of your worries over your shoulder, and kindly nudging a new moon to lift up from the clouds of death as a broken piece of stainless steel forged into a armory where your grandfather thought of your name, guessed the color of your companion's eyes and knew the sword he was making would break one day. The food in your belly dissolves into dark dreams you have trouble digesting because not only do you remember them, you even understand them. Love floats between the spaces of your chest, and you are left bereft of the security of faith, color and the coming of night where you can desert yourself, detach to an unknown destination, return to the nakedness of your lies and masks and parents. You are not getting any younger and sleep comes more easily than immortality, and newscasters seems more irritable. You want the rest of soul, ease of breath, collapse of hate and judgment, for a time and space in your life when solace was not a word but a painting you knew Van Gogh gave birth to at great expense, for you and nobody else a long time ago.

## The Barefoot Countessa

I read in the newspaper today  
that they sold Humphrey Bogart's  
hat he wore in the movie for  
\$500. It should have fetched  
more. After I watched the movie  
I cried in my sleep for the  
woman who was beautiful and  
tragic, one trapped in a movie  
of love and deceit. And I could not  
save her. Her white fur coat washed  
away my ten year old innocence  
and her tears covered me  
with a film of protection from  
lovelessness. I cried for all  
this. I vowed to declare my  
love to Nadya Ajanee the next  
morning, when my heart would  
admit to itself, go high on its own,  
saying, "you are a romantic". The  
hat should have fetched more.  
The Countessa is still alive,  
how do you think she still feels?  
All those tears for \$500.  
The world, I and Humphrey deserve more.

## Typhoon

Renegade clouds approach  
to the corner of my eye  
leaving the blueness of what is  
above me pushing on the eyelids  
of the other. I want to meditate.  
For the last half hour I biked  
over stubborn hills to come near the  
water where a young fly buzzes  
louder than the people and  
leaves who names I do not know  
brush my face looking furtively at the  
lick of the wind wetting my lips.  
My breath is under my hands,  
the diaphragm rolling with the wheeze  
of the stones I slithered on, oozing  
into each crack. I know I am not  
supposed to think of anything,  
I have to just be. But I am  
running into a gentle, arms open wide,  
a laughing sort of sleep. Nobody is  
going to take the bike. I can  
meditate some other time. Clouds  
have run away, the fly ruminating if  
the world is round, on my leg. And the  
lick on my lips. The knot unravels,  
and I am really not thinking of anything.  
But I am definitely not meditating.  
I see a typhoon over the tree before I slide away  
to somewhere. It can wait. Meditating can wait.  
For the next thirty five minutes I will belong to sleep.

## Spin

Thirst of adventure drips with the  
rose water of freedom down my  
throat. This life of mulling over choices,  
planning the future, as if it were a garden  
with seeds coming from a t.v. offer,  
is not from me. Yesterday I saw  
Garcia beckoning to me in the dusk,  
but I had to make dinner, time  
was at a premium and so I could not  
write Spanish sonatas by his knees.  
There is a life to be lived by me  
where each day is a joy and  
each night a tragedy, where  
the body will tire, the mind will  
bubble and soul will ask for a  
earth to rest on. Secrets of worth  
are within the whispers of strangers  
and stories which belong to you float  
in the moans of other adventurers.  
Nothing is mine except the life I live.  
Mary, listen to me, we have to explode  
into little pieces. It is simple and necessary.  
We are in this spin together.  
And don't worry, boredom is for the wise.



## Mines

for Vaughn, Holliday and Fitzgerald

Darling, there is an elvish ghost  
at the foot of my bed,  
and he saying you have  
been playing me for a lonely fool.  
There must be a mistake  
because you declared your love  
to me last night after a kiss  
and I know you can't lie  
since we are a long way from home.  
Whispers the color of blue  
are invading my thoughts,  
the urge to dance with you  
is disappearing into noise outside  
the window from where I have  
not been able to find anything.  
Days gone by are being tripped  
by me as I step on them  
the pain nothing compared  
to the loss of love that is now  
put and declared tenderly on the neon signs  
across the street.  
Darling, tell the elvish ghost  
he is wrong. We have a world  
to save in the morning. Please,  
darling, say it isn't so.

## Sarah

She was much taller than me and  
not destined to become the object of  
several love poems several years later.  
Kind, soft spoken, and if I remember  
correctly, carrying a disappointment  
of the soul. Never talked much to  
the boys and was far from the giggles  
of the girls. There was a world of hers  
which her father would enter into  
everyday as he came to pick her up from  
school. As a courtesy to her and her  
world, my mother ask me to invite  
her to my birthday party. She never  
came. We never talked much. Several  
months later I was invited to  
her birthday but due to lack of transportation  
neither me nor my world could go. At  
the end of my tour of duty in Class II K,  
her father told my father, where I don't  
know, that they were leaving to go  
elsewhere, where I don't know.  
Today, I feel myself craving for news  
about her, from her. Such is  
the torture of childhood and age.  
She would know.  
Her name Sarah Wali Mohammed  
and she has one of the keys  
to the doors inside my head.

## Hurry

Don't hurry away far into the  
light which no longer reflects  
off the back of the woman who  
took the dip within the pools  
belonging to my anger. Stay my  
guide, stay, talk to me with  
promises of comfort and understanding,  
ask me questions whose answers  
I know, hold me from skidding  
toward words that carry no love or  
touch, heal me from the sickness  
of hurrying head long to a bright night  
where skeleton frames of cars kiss  
errant bullets. My spine is wet, my neck  
is soft, shake me from wanting, to be  
cut into a million prisms; suggest a  
salvation for me. Hurry, protect  
me from the flirting smiles of evil,  
and give me the amulet that will stop my fall.  
There is a need for you by me on the  
vacant shore. The day is just beginning  
and I am being slapped into submission  
by men who dig wells of blood with  
their claws. Don't hurry away. Hurry  
towards a shard of freedoms left  
behind by demons which  
we are doomed to look into and  
kiss, for the birth of a thousand mirrors,  
a thousand aches.

## Drenched

Leave me alone world, leave me alone  
    I am making love to a meteor  
ask me nothing of your aching  
    I am burning in ice, dust and fire  
tell me not of your blood and screams  
    I am meditating the future  
hide from me your trivial champagne gossip  
    I am riding a black horse oh hills of heaven  
slip away your hisses of doom  
    I am crying for mists of the past  
pocket the bombs and rapes  
    I am languoring under an open wombed sky  
but stay  
    whisper to me that the day will end well  
    the dirt under my nails will disappear  
dance with your soul around me  
    we need to keep the darkness at bay  
read in a loud voice, prophecies by lunatics,  
    the aching of our lives needs to be swallowed  
run over my back with your bare feet  
    I need to know I am mortal  
paint all your suspicion and doubt as graffiti on my arms  
    I have to wade through rivers of hate  
kiss me with your red lipstick of wisdom  
    there is hope in a drenching by romantics  
leave me alone and stay  
    at your discretion.

## Burden of Maya

This is not the time to die.  
Pyramids and monuments are gathering  
moss and dew while the ancient bricks  
with smells of secret mutterings and  
undoings lace the images blaming on  
the sides of my pupils. A long time  
ago, there were people who caught  
stars with a fish net of love  
and faith, asking squabbling but  
respectful gods, if the maize they plant  
will be the food for their  
children. Eyebrows curved over  
rainbows snatched from galloping  
clouds, and masks hid the abyss  
from souls lost in green jungles in a  
land where I was born a long  
time ago, a long time before death.  
My brethren, father and mother,  
the memory of your weight burdens  
me; I walk alone as last of the  
breed of swaggering tricksters  
and prophets, laughing through echoes  
of smoke, stench and loss. If there  
is respite I want none, for floating  
spirits tell me, no matter how  
much death there is to eat,  
this is not the time to die.

## Dilemma of Mephistopheles

In a middle of a land close  
to a border where I desperately wait  
to cross without a valid passport  
I dreamt of friends I no longer write  
to. The lack of electricity here crackles  
the wire inside my brain with heat  
but the dream was full of rooms with  
white snow. I fear for my friends,  
that we will drift away together  
with promises of electricity for this  
place, dreaming at critical times  
of our lives pictures of big rooms  
with snow in it. There is no way  
it can be helped; dreams and  
drift of friends are hardwired into  
our skins in the womb of mothers  
who have all met Mephistopheles.  
We are all his children. And we  
are caught between snow and fire,  
lawlessness and law, poetry  
and truth. Mary assured me with  
her nakedness in the morning such  
dilemmas are the fate of people  
who don't want a grave.  
Mephistopheles surely must have smiled  
at that. One of his sons  
had succeeded in forgiving him.

## Shrapnel

I am writing songs on the curve  
of her back, songs in which  
the hope to lead a full life is  
bullet ridden with doubt. There  
are whisperings in my fingers,  
quiet mumblings of those days.  
when I don't know the  
day my father would die or that  
before he died, my mother was  
ready to leave him. Shrapnel  
of the war in front of me has  
dug into my wrist, nerves  
severed, but the songs come  
out, out of this blow torch  
of a debate against resignation.  
Shrapnel everywhere, flying  
with wings outstretched  
and I slip behind the valley  
just over the curve of her back.  
Gregorian chants are scampering  
towards me from under the  
cloaks of executioners, hollering  
softly nerves are akin to the lizard's  
tail, they will grow back, and  
that songs written on the curve  
of a lovers back will sink quicker  
than a bloodied stone into the  
consciousness of a loud, forgetting world.

## Ravine

Often it comes to me before  
sleep the worry of what my  
father thought just before  
dying into the swirling water  
around him. I wonder as the  
old, crowded bus crashed  
through the railings, its wheels  
howling in fear, spinning wildly,  
if my father knew there was  
a death, a final one, stuck into  
the floor of the river in the lonely  
ravine in front of him. Did he scream  
as the people and suitcases and words  
and regrets and promises  
tumbled over and over, behind,  
in front, under, over him? And  
when he got wet, did he remember  
his childhood, when he first learnt  
to swim, did he at first glide on  
the cold water waves, before  
this blood, his moustache and  
beard froze? I want to know.  
It is my right. I am his son. At  
least you mother fucking, son of a  
bitch of a God, let me  
cradle his body in my arms  
so that some warmth may return to it.  
It is his right not to lie on a floor of  
echoes at the feet of my mother half naked  
with illiterate military policemen hovering  
over him. I hope his soul is etched into the  
walls of the ravine. If not, I will carve it on the foreheads  
of the ghosts crying there.



## Sail

There is always truth in my lies.  
I am broken down to the clay I have  
been glazed from and all that remains  
in this lie that life is an expression  
of the glory of birth. I have been  
broken by you, all I have said stopping  
without a foot on brakes against  
your sixth sense which slashes  
on your heart, you are right. I  
can't fight such a river of water  
and color washing my ankles with  
what I had said so long ago,  
God show thy self. And so my  
child, forget your pride, you will  
never see me, and the fact that  
one of your brothers parted the  
Red Sea, was a fluke of nature.  
My God, thou has forsaken me  
and I am the last of the prophets,  
can you bear my guilt? Where are  
your tears which will become  
clean hands gently wiping the lies  
away and letting a breeze skim  
over my skin. I hoisted my sail,  
to dodge those waves full of lumbering  
half-truths but there is only so  
much I can huff and puff onto  
a taut fabric stretched tight across the soft  
pauses of you, my friend, not you, dear God.  
Blow into my sail, you two, my life depends on it.

## Slave

Slave to you, to your every whim,  
leaving me decrepit in my quota of  
silent dreams. This is no way  
to live. Who the hell gave you  
the right to dig into my back  
with your plough and drag that  
sharp metal all the way across  
my soul so you could flick  
a couple of seeds for your agricultural  
enjoyment. Is it not enough I am  
the buffalo to the wheel that  
gets you cool water in the  
morning, chained from my  
nostrils, my own breathe  
carrying the stench of slavery.  
Release us, it is our fucking  
right to be decent, to not have  
to look at our shit and wonder  
which wall of the house will  
I build with this to sleep with my  
wife who has already collapsed in  
exhaustion. How long more do  
I have to bend my neck in domesticated  
servility by force to your role. I say,  
fuck you. You own me no more.  
I am eloping with the freedom  
reserved for martyrs and wrapping  
your chains around your wrists. Come and  
search me out. Let us see if you can  
catch me. Slave at birth but not at death.  
Lets see now, you bastard, whose fingers presses whose  
face through the glass windows of torture rooms.

## Exodus

I am in an exodus towards a destination that I am not sure belongs to me or not. People who were supposed to be with me now dropped on the sides of the roads where concerned folk gave them glasses of water and a quick prayer or two for their health. In the marathon, they quit a long time ago, the sun dripping yellow sap to smooth the skin on the bottom of their feet. Such is the solace for those who every morning when they wake up and wash their face wondering if tomorrow will be one day close to the weekend. Their souls have dried, quiet and dead, remembering if all the massacres in our history were good stuff to read for the appearance of being educated. Ahead, is this destination, that might force me to give up my loves, or perhaps even worse, make me die at the time I am supposed to. Madness aside, there is a glaze of *deja vu's* all over me; I have been on this exodus before. There has been anger and loss at the end. And there will be more again.

## Gypsy

Question is where am I going  
to settle down? Leaves fall  
at my feet and I the sound  
of scrunching corpses, as if I was  
getting satisfaction from knowing  
that at least there will be leaves  
wherever I settle down. Hopefully  
my neighbors will not be boring  
and the street outside my door  
does not have blood as markers  
of reality. It will be some place  
when I can breathe, where I  
am close to the wilderness of  
my wants and near an old movie  
theater which shows European  
movies. The house I will design, the  
place in a part of the universe where  
I can kiss my love at will, teach  
my children at ease and learn  
from those who die over and over  
again every night. Ocean will be  
rolling at an earshot away  
and open sky pirouetting on high cliffs.  
At a convenient distance will be great  
food, cheaply priced ethnic restaurants, a  
gathering of weird people and bars  
where bands will dish it out. Where I settle  
down seasons will change. Leaves will fall  
and gypsies will huddle around an old fire  
for the sake of being alive.

## Cigarette

He pulls onto the cigarette  
thinking even if this black smoke  
fills him up, choking the clear  
thoughts of the woman he is going  
to leave, he can still salvage the  
glory that was his. Radiation from  
the television has ceased because  
it is after two in the morning, the  
air squeezing by the torn mosquito net  
on the window brushes on his  
beard reluctantly, nonchalantly,  
and there is no one to talk to. It is  
too late to play his music, head  
is swaying under the weight of  
complicated plans and he badly  
wants to live an adventure. Right  
leg tucked under him, newspapers  
by his side, a lazy glass of whiskey  
poured for him by his rebellious foolhardy  
son, ashes fall into the ash tray  
when he remembers the house  
he was born in. Above is a 60 watt  
bulb wheezing light, ahead a faint  
red slavish glow and below a cold  
floor which needs to be swept.  
Sleep is a far away comfort, damnation a  
nearby drug and the hand that  
presses sandpaper on his back slowly,  
rubbing it over, a nuisance. Through  
the fog of nicotine, he believes things once again will be o.k.

## Shame

The light from the oncoming cars  
makes me bow my head. The bow  
makes an arc and I can  
hear the swish of the samurai  
blade slip under the skirts  
of the air behind my neck.  
There is no glory in death and  
contrary to all that I dream  
and whisper to you, I don't  
want to die. But the light  
from the cars, those bright open  
eyes that don't say anything, don't  
mention love kills, don't tell  
you they are coming on to you  
with a vengeance which is  
not your fault, I am thinking,  
praying might help. I have been  
shamed, humiliated without  
consent. I have no power to  
stand on that black concrete  
highway of beliefs and have the  
cars through me or around me.  
Inevitability of losing sets in, the  
throttle inside me sputtering. And damn,  
the cars just go by. And damn, I  
keep on walking as people fall  
to the earth which gave birth to them without shame.

## Testament

My jet black hair will become white,  
it won't fall off but it will turn white.  
Hands will start to falter, knees  
will shake and the mind will  
wander to unknown crevasses.  
Glory of being alive will be the fact  
that I could get up every morning,  
all other glories now hidden,  
or lost or unwanted. My lips will be  
dry for kisses, my pride ossified into  
my bones, all my loves curling into  
a slow whorl of sadness, my eyes  
over reaching beyond the balcony  
railings of my sockets to dip  
into happiness, any happiness.  
I am going to be planted back into  
the ground, an urgent request to  
retreat back to the womb; I  
really don't want to go. But the  
whisperings say I will be back  
(as Orlando from the Virginia Woolf novel)  
and for now rest is recommended.  
I will miss the sex. And the  
running. And the power to commit suicide. This  
is an old testament to an  
old injustice. Stillness is  
arriving in a taxi cab and the  
destination from here is unknown.  
Good, that way I will not get bored.

## Rage

There is a simmering volcanic rage  
which bubbles in your throat.  
You have seen this boy shot at  
the back of the neck, frozen  
in midair, in the act of running  
from the bullet, and then sprawling  
across those dreams which  
have no windows to look out of.  
Blood from his mouth, over his  
arm, the eyelids closing on a  
world I am forced to forget and  
forgive, the muscles relaxing  
for the final time and then  
the last breath reaches your  
ear which snaps all the anger  
for the bastards who kill, into place;  
you are rage, there is no turning  
back and you will kill too  
and think it is now  
right and you know I can't  
stop you, I will not stop you,  
don't ask me why  
because that was my boy  
and I choose to be rage,  
I have not forgiven and want revenge,  
just this one time,  
there is no sense in all this  
I know, this is rage  
and till tomorrow I will not give it up.



