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وادي السلام

The Valley of Peace

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

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at

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by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Abstract

In 2017 I travelled to Iraq for the first time. I became mesmerised by the culture surrounding death and grief: the Iraqi tradition of grieving for forty days, the roads leading from my hometown of Najaf to Karbala lined with martyrs' photographs. Najaf is home to Wadi Al Salam: the world's biggest cemetery, in translation, *the Valley of Peace*. I became obsessed with the cemetery's history and couldn't stop talking about its name, suffused as it was with poetry. It is a name to transfix and enthrall, one that proved indelible.

The cemetery is impossible to avoid, and looking out either window you're met with endless stretches of land covered in headstones, some almost completely shattered and all covered in a film of fine sand. There is some comfort in death here and the contrast between the tidy, sterile suburbs of Aotearoa where I now live with the grit and pain-soaked landscape of Najaf is incredible.

On my return to Aotearoa, I felt for the first time, a sense of longing for 'home,' and the disquiet that neither Iraq nor Aotearoa felt sufficient or fitting for the term, like the knowledge of the existence of another place—a place that I should fight and die for had shattered my perception of home. Home was suddenly ephemeral and impermanent.

This collection of poetry, وادي السلام, the Valley of Peace, is an exploration of growing up in Aotearoa as an Iraqi Muslim, wanting to encapsulate the isolation of migrants,

and refugees, in diaspora. These two very separate parts of an inseparable whole, dual parts of who I am.

The final piece in this collection is written in Arabic, not only as an expression of myself, for myself, but as a gift to my people.

*For all those who were forced to
make their homes in a foreign land
& for the kind souls who welcome them.*

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Najaf's Daughter

I come from motion sickness
and vomit-stained car seats
from cramped bodies
and paper wrapped sweets

I come from cracked and speckled sparrow eggs
held too tight
from hollowed out carcasses
and pits of blood

I come from the valley of peace
the dumping ground of martyrs

and from beneath the skin's surface
as bruises
and burst vessels

I come from the turning red earth
the impossible scorching sand
coloured by lost life

I come to you in pictures of
grazed knees and quick recoveries

you

safe baby
the waste product of a broken-down body
a loving mother and watchful father

you

an emblem of resistance against the
turning tides of the Tasman Sea

I come from the split second
pause
before the storm

Road Kill

blood pacts like death drips

and

trip down the white pebble path behind your house

hold your breath for the sting

break the skin seal in the car home

let the dirt in

cause you're bored

counting the

roadkill

tabby with its guts all out

one

duck with a broken neck

two...

we were children who held conch shells

to our ears with the promise of crashing waters

and fine sand beaches

you were a kid

with blu tack stuck in your hair

stuck in the carpet

in your mouth
chewing it like gum
whose lips turn in the theatre between curtain fall
as the set shifts
the throat clearing
sniffles break the silence
vibrations through the seats when you laugh
we immortalised ourselves in the drying concrete pool
that secured the green lamp post outside
that was the autumn your father's boat sank
and suddenly you weren't at arm's length anymore
not walking distance either
I dreamt you drove off the cliff's edge once
tyres hit a bump
some trap between the street lights
a german shepherd for your count
three

Ra 26

The teacher I had when I was eleven
was an irascible woman with lean muscular arms
and hair the colour of her temper
who used to show us photos of her expeditions in Africa on a projector in the
afternoons
she introduced our class to the work of Natalie Babbitt
Louis Sachar and Sharon Creech
cross-legged we'd spend our lunchtimes at her feet as she read
tearing up at the sad bits and pausing for commentary
she urged us to notice the little things
so we spent the afternoon after school taking slow steps home
acknowledging every leaf
every blade of grass
every cloud that passed overhead
we learned their names

Cumulus,

Altocumulus,

Cirrocumulus

when we arrived home the light inside the house was bright and there were moths
circling the garden lamps
we pictured ourselves on expeditions
we'd read up on survival manuals in the library
and then we could go on our own adventures
and you'd know which snakes were the venomous ones
and I could teach you how to get out of quicksand
if you ever found yourself in it

The Homestead (1980)

look upon what remains
of this quicksand country
shades of green hills
that climb
like
get to higher ground
see how the earth pulls
the puriri
its boughs
sinewy arms
searching for stillness
save us from the sinking
shouts the foreground
but our limbs aren't long enough
to stretch the verdant plains
or reach the copycat sky

The Final Prayer

you are under no obligation to

await the dawn

you and I who

formed from clay

come as

long-limbed lustful

creatures of habit

hollow vessels before

he granted us

souls

our capacity to love

to hold and touch

gentle human flaws

the sky is turning

like blood washes out

of fabric and

the sun is on the incline

the space between you and God

is narrow and permeable
you are the earliest bird
and your whispers are serrated
power enough to tear through your chest
into benevolent palms

you've always been held
and you can finally feel it
and prayers do not echo
they land
you are all too aware of your fault
lines down the middle
minute cracks on your surface
to shatter in half
and let the earth catch you
you are under no obligation to witness
the outpour of light

White Kites

after 'If I Must Die' by Refaat Alareer

pour your blood
over these pixels
of dead boy in daddy's lap
the soul shriek above the shots
the rubble 'tween the bodies
of dark haired
wide eyed
olivewood children

p l u c k
at gut parasites and gore
bear witness to this
vibrant high definition image
the headlines
swarms of rage in your streets
the poetry of
Ghassan Kanafani
and Refaat Alareer

the numbers that glare and grow
so prove yourself sane
having never
argued the futility
of these actions
from thousands of miles away
pour your blood
over your grandpa
pour it out
over the asphalt
these pages
stain this day of the calendar

and when you've near run dry
hardly blood left to
spot, spill or stain
lay down on the earth
of which we are all made
and eyes to the sky
watch our white kites over gaza

Fatima / Investment in Settling

for someone so frequently uprooted
you've got an odd fixation on forever
you build to build and urge the dust to settle
you collect for your nest
something to adorn the entrance
something to split and shatter then tape together
you scan the aisles and reach for the
most haunted object
the eyes on the whittled ducks
balanced atop the rangehood
glisten
and whatever spirit was trapped beneath
is now crawling through the walls
and you'd never have made it feel a stranger

for someone so frequently torn
you've not turned to leather nor
stuck your nails in throats
going down
I don't remember your grief

when it bore through your enamel

but

I've seen your eyes in photographs

from the year it was slipping

you remind me that flesh is borrowed

and the blood isn't heavy

for someone whose faith has so often

been tested

you have no trouble propelling

yourself forward

so as to cling to your prayers

and you say

it's not that it can't be gone in an instant

it's just that now it doesn't matter

Your Tears Scald the Dead

“Your tears scald the dead” my mother told me once, when we got the phone call and my eyes were welling up with tears for the soul that had in the witching hour ascended and found it didn’t miss gravity. She told us all not to cry. *“Your tears scald the dead and you wouldn’t want to burn her.”* I took her words, and I held them up for a long while, I followed the lines in the letters and placed up the sign. ***Water park closed until further notice.*** Mum was pleased that we’d taken kindly to grief unaware of the growth above my left breast. She made a place for the dark clothed woman whose weight made no indent on the couch and cut her fruit that she served on a silver dish to please her. All the while the growth kept on. It pushed, it pleaded, it choked. “Mum, I think I’m dying.” The woman watched me with empty sockets as I held my pain in a hand, and I pushed. Hard. I placed my head down between my knees and I held on. *Your tears scald the dead.* My mother said, and yet I would find her weeping in the corner furthest from the door, hidden in the dark, under her abaya. It was raining the night I stepped onto the planks outside and let the growth drain, ugly, bloody, weeping. It wept and it wept, and I was certain. That it wasn’t tears that scalded the dead. It was this.

Layla ليلي (A Night)

these are shallow
dunes to trip and
snap your neck on

the veiled soul stretches
the landscape arch
which the vertebrae pulls

and then
snaps back

Azrael
in the background
amongst the shades of
soot smoke
in the foreground amongst
the decay

the melding of earth with flesh
veins with roots and the charred

cypress tree trunks
from which the sun has fled
and the moon has followed
it's a pitch white sky

وأنت لا تزال هنا
(and you're still here)

what to do with you?
the pieces of you hitting the walls
you dripping off the canvas
and the fabric is burning still
and the image is
somehow kinder illuminated
it's all intentional
it's all political and
the edges fray and curl
the wooden easel splits, it stretches
and
snaps back

Prison Torture etc.

i've been thinking about wounds
& about the weapons that create them
about the people who create the weapons
& the people who carry them
on their shoulders
or press a button to propel them

the people who bear the pain deserve their own poem

(the people who suffer the scars deserve new skin)

they give bullets delicate names
butterflies and dumdums
test them on children kicking
footballs across
dirt roads
let them push through flesh
expand on impact
run away with your limbs

ingenious methods of torture

alive and writhing
in film
photographs &
the subconscious mind
passed in a single telling over
several glasses of tea
and one cup of water

I had this recurring dream as a kid
where i'm hanging from the blades
of a ceiling fan
the rope cut into my wrists
and my body kept spinning
long after i'd departed the scene

i've been thinking about flesh
and how much pain
the body (a body) can take
before it gives

Ali

suppose we're kids still
and you're swinging yourself
off the branch of the willow
into the lilac late afternoon
fall into the stillness of
having nothing better to do
than await the echoed call
your mother's voice

Ali

Ali

Ali

it's time you come back home

certain you yearn
for the house at the cul-de-sac
the swan plants up the side
of the driveway
the sour scent of butterfly wings

the bubble blisters on your palms
from gripping the railing in the sun

counting to ten and again
to distract from the pain

I suppose I miss the
salt taste of our beaten skin
limbs we graze and bruise
engineered for hits

I remember watching you peel the
tough golden pieces of
skin off your palms with your teeth

I remember watching you
knee-deep in the quicksand
child turning grim
drenched with the dark
curtains open to a blackened sky

There are places that still host the
heat vibrations

of early summers
and i'm becoming less and less sure
that i'm not the only one
returning to them
Ali

ابونا الرسول

Our Father the Prophet

my older sisters grew up believing/our father was a prophet/couldn't tell him they knew/baba might have to go away/hushed girl voices under the covers/discussions of evidence/red flickering light/cracks in the bedroom door/baba in the camp/baba head down over the quran/baba backlit by the setting sun/agate eyes/baba has agate eyes/baba who gathers his words/wheat stalks in torn palms/collects his rage/gets into fist fights with giant men/collects his rage/i grew up convinced our father was a serial killer/stalking on wet asphalt/large brown leather hands/snapping necks/the remorseful kind of killer/moving through the hallways at 4am/retching/bent beneath my bedroom window/i was planted here/with more intention than care/like peppermint/the journey left me defective/scars on this infant's body/i didn't understand/i saw rage/i saw sickness/i saw furrowed brows/baba didn't pull me from the arms of death/he didn't reappear with the ship to freedom/i couldn't see his insides/insides suspended/in grief/in perturbation/made to resemble/embryo in formaldehyde.

Here's to the Guilt of 'Making It'

if you make it over the waves

if your stomach hasn't gone overboard

pulled into a whirlpool

and cast out into the open air

don't think about the boat before you

don't wonder why you made it to shore

the others weren't blessed with buoyancy

don't ask why the men with the speedboats and

life jackets that could've saved them

stood to watch glass-eyed from the dock as they

went under

there is wishing for ignorance

there is farewelling your faith in the goodness of man

and some people are made for suffering

they do it tremendously well

they don't flinch

when flies crawl into the

open wounds in their bellies

and lay their eggs within

they too make children

like you

make children

yours you watch crumble

scatter like breadcrumbs to mark

the road to here

if you make it over the waves

don't make a shrine for what was stolen

Self-immolation / Acts of Protest

they'd have killed you twice
then thrice to want to blame you
for the way you turned out
and what a way to go

up

rising

with the sound
of your voice
a shrill cry for an end
i want to believe that those flames
were descendants of the fire
that should've burnt
our prophet Ibrahim
but didn't

I want to believe that your teeth
chattered with the chill

and you were amused by the cold
spilling yourself as an instrument
of protest
blood hitting the asphalt
loud was the sound

you wanted to be a writer
your parents said so in an interview
and they were the colour
of the drywall
faces in perpetual anguish
because you were away often
but you weren't supposed to go
your art between the pages of a torn
composition notebook

I read your story about your lover
about the beekeeper and russia
about your mum and dad and your
dreams
your poetry from before you

knew how to make the words sound

‘pretty’

and the violence makes us stop

but who you are made us stay

you’ve not left us with

anything less to stand by

and it’s all about the delivery

**Most of This Terrain Is
Scarred**

this skull is my father's

sharp narrow jaw

heavy brow

high nose

this sense of humour too

a joke at your expense

salt sting to your grazes

a twinkle in deep-set

eyes

the damage

fallen brother

prison torture

waves that consume

the burial for your firstborn

one vessel couldn't hold

i'm the overspill

stain clinging to the fibres of your shirt

temperamental tide pulling in

and moving out
we went back to what remained
of the first home my mother and father ever owned
they'd left everything behind when they fled
the shell shock, morning murder parade
and returned
to an outline in sand

Prophetic Dreams over the Waikato River

for Hajar

the wind is picking up
the moonlight and the bridge are shaking
picking up the
white cotton of your prayer dress
there's gravel stuck to your forehead
listen to the
shifting
the hurried shuffle of the ferns
and the fantail on the faraway iron fence
a song for sinking
to carry you over
before the final verse is spoken

Lord and Sea

sinister is the darkened sea
the rips beneath the cauldron potion
the gazes
upon its deceitful
stillness
to hold your frame hence
and crucify yourself
to fall fast unto the rocks
atone for the sins of the
idle bloated bodies
brother
who could have made something
of value if not to
beautify the rot
the sting of salt in torn flesh
or paint the rust coloured sky
blue
just in time for the
damned dawn
and the gulls cry as

the fishermen haul in the
biggest catch of the day

Clouds Shaped

like Crouching Child

he throws a punch

wakes up

cold hand bent beneath

his gold speckled chin

cardinal egg

capillary cracks in the shell

baby bird with a falcon wing

with nothing to fight

but the fading of moonlight

and mama and baba sleep under

the pungent stench of loss

for the boy on the brick steps

tired eyes gazing into

the face of eternity

past

antiemetics and felt beanies

linoleum floor and ripples of light

whispered prayers and downturned gazes

clouds shaped

like crouching child

Stay Here

you should be here
to claim what remains of the wreckage
& build upon the bones
there is so much for you in the land of plenty
frankincense & gasoline
gold & gastro
a family with names to learn
stories that never include you

you should stay long enough to play a part in the tale
to hold the kite that gets caught in the tree
imagine there is a tree
to break a bone in some tragically comic stunt
imagine you have the guts
to throw up on a plate of individually wrapped caramel sweets
there they are

you should have left me a city to bear the sight of
where the buried bodies
in their millions do not touch

you should have left the walls of my parent's home
you shouldn't blame the people who saw it abandoned
& broke in to take what had collected dust
left us nothing
not our picture frames
not the windows & door handles
they took my late brother's cot
their child fell asleep in that bed
& never again woke up

how she cried over you
when you came to see her
& when you passed under the quran to escape her

you should live
a life in service of the thankless
pick yourself apart
separate the chambers
gaze backward & leave half your heart

The Years to Sow the Seeds

sure you can let the

sand

sink

take you down gold

& billion grit grain

& suffocate with what you've created

without so much as whisper of protest

this world isn't yours to inhabit eternally

& so why fight it?

You need the years to sow the seeds

my uncle said

before he spilt a cup of hot black tea on his

desert dune

coloured thawb

something that I wrote on a post-it note

by the sliver of street light that penetrated the sunroof

no mention of the harvest

but no matter

the seeds are really the most crucial part

you leave the rest to nature

I wonder where I'd placed my seeds

whether I'd even had any to begin with

did I lose them when we scaled the cicada storm?

or sold them for frozen lemonade

only to share my purchase

with the sandflies?

& the skin on our legs

with the gravel?

come let's find the seeds like wally

somewhere in the sea of red bucket hats

bulk sunscreen pump bottles

clovers and thistles

You need the years to sow the seeds

and the soil to grow them

When the Power Cuts, the Light Strikes Twice

it signifies the break in the current
an alert to the dark

the devout dig
elbow deep in the crowd
of pilgrims
pass with the grace of running water
over jagged rocks
fingers outstretched
lips to kiss the brass
whispers past the
wide web window

you unstick yourself from sin
so that the remnants
the shame
the knowledge
that finer film
the real adhesive
bothersome bunching bits

remain

you pray that god's sight is selective

that your ignorance to

the television blaring the latest

fragmented frankenstein

horror will be forgiven

stray dog whimpers

and the walls are penetrated by voices

at first low

then howling

rust streaks along the bannister

The Spilling

a book

a window

the rustling

the rapture

our bricks

my skin

a mesh

the desk

the ink

the

s

p

i

l

l

a desk

the wind

the leaves

our house

the earth

our skin

a mesh

the papers

the ink

i

n

g

a dresser

the trees

the horn

our garden

the tearing

a mesh

the window

the pen

the ink

A Feature of the Old House

your first home was all
tears and silent sobbing
you would tell me sometimes
that you remember distinctly a night
when the air was thick with
static
a monotonous voice saying
something like:

assassination
wedding day
groom
cut into bits
they made his bride watch

I trust you tried to catch the
delicate frame that collapsed onto you
your fibres pushing against her skin
in your attempt at a comforting embrace
if you could

cover her eyes
block her ears
you would have
wouldn't you?

they moved you once a season
hauled you past the glass sliding door
and onto the concrete outside
plump fingers and tiny feet cover you
in dish soap and water
brush you over
and leave you to dry

you felt so loved then
before the girls started seeing you as a chore
before their thin arms started to hurt
as the brushes they held passed over you

some years later

as you lay suspended from an iron bar
you watched one of the girls

concealed from other eyes
tearfully bidding her mother's
mother farewell
through a cracked phone
for the last time

then
some years later

she would see you
rolled up in the trunk of her
father's black van
on your way to another home
somewhere across the city
you could hardly breathe
in that thick plastic they put you in

but you would never have said a thing
you never did complain
you would be used to
carrying the weight

whatever and whoever it was

The Fragrance of Flowers

those yusifiya nights
were not so cruel as the men
that landed
with heavy boots to bruise this holy land

those that had taken and shaken
stirring the red sand
strikes against the earth

their many grasping hands
with force unfurling
your fine cotton petals

عبير (Abeer)

follow the footsteps as they recede
torment with your
fragrance
ya yasmeen, ya narjis
adhere yourself to the underside
of their fingernails
though you had wished for a better place to go

persist

and when the sky is torn on the horizon

to make space for the night

عبير

you will go with the wind and fill the lungs

and when those men lay down to die

it is only your memory that remains

The Left Coast

he recounts the dawn
a meeting magnified by memory

endless fields
tired
turning earth
beneath a merciless sun
the tide
beneath the tigris

dirt on his hot wet skin
her dark hair pulled by the current
where she stood
arms stretched above the water
palms upturned
fingers like landing strips for the mist

he dreamt of having
of holding her
any part

now there are
many pieces to choose from
though none that could speak
or warm his cold hands

he'd placed fragments of her in my hands
and I closed my fingers around them
ask him what had happened
let him tell you what he knows
where is she now?
whole and haunting

a phantom fair and floating

Begin Again

1. lay like dead & welcome

the garnet red sand

to puncture your heavy virgin lungs

2. spin shadow & head

with the overhead fan

3. find value in knowledge again

reach within yourself for something

precious & holy

4. pick pearls from

the back of your throat

ivory & unblemished

spit covered gems

5. dream like you once did

so that figures in your subconscious

are fanged & clawed

6. pull the cold quilted covers down

& let the beasts find you

7. befriend the ache in all its forms

& frequencies

8. project to the sky, to the earth, to the shower drain

whatever is left to give

9. scream till the pearls pour

10. let the sound hit the walls

& fall till it can fall no further

11. begin again.

Valentines '25

Are you sure that you love us after all that we've committed before you? Will you forgive us for the grazes and the burns and the self-inflicted wounds on this loaned body? you made me after all. You invented sunlight and you placed me beneath it so that I might turn a little golden and warm. You placed her before me and gave her the heart to want me. You granted us radiant souls, sticky like syrup and a friend for the light to bounce off and move through. You set us two steps apart from one another and one head taller. I now remember what mama said about cutting flowers, the tragedy of shortening its life so that it may exist for an afternoon, in a tall glass on your bookshelf. I hope that you will forgive her for picking the stalks of the lavender bush and forgive me for letting them wilt on the bedsheets while we busied ourselves with other things. I hope that you will forgive me for not holding her tighter that night and forgive me for holding her too tight. I think you heard the rib crack. You know that she could tell me anything and I would swear upon its truth. She would have worshipped you if you'd told her not to and amplified the sound of the river of wine. She, who reached inside of me for a flicker of purity to burn her open wounds shut. Where she lifted the curtains to squint into the face of rage

how could you scare me like that?

Myna in the Suburbs

there's paper scuttling across a grey road
like some nightmare suburban crab
and it's darker than i'd expected for
a midsummer evening
like I could fall into the space between street lamps
and not again emerge into the light

i'm thinking
 and i'm always thinking
about the
cool tone couple who walk hand in hand
one with a needle point voice
that claims victory over the wind and
i'm trying to make out what they're talking about
from words that flutter
sway and fall

i wonder if they'd seen the
the dark haired boy in the window
his head turned

and mouth open
in my mind he's being held captive and
tonight he plans to escape
in my mind he'd made friends with a sahira
who'd turn him into a
common myna so that he could hop from rooftop
to rooftop and sing for freedom

a night of life before
being crushed under the
weight of an automobile

I ponder the unfortunate fates of my
characters as i wait to cross the road

the path before me shifts
It hides behind a
satellite dish
a kowhai
a dark cloud
the red brick house beyond the roundabout

i wish i'd made friends with a sahira

in my mind I was more than

a collection of thoughts

in my mind I could create kinder endings

and when I cross the road

my bird feet

carry my bird body

all the way home.

The Soul Is a Silver Fish

ك says that death always arrives earlier than you'd predicted
dressed in a thawb much like baba's though colder
and dark like the inside of a well
ك says that the soul is hooked
and like a silver fish
it fights
death's harpoon-like staff
ripping holes in its mouth
and it hurts less to let yourself be caught
and like blood you trickle out through a nostril
ك grew up with death comforted by holding the manual
telling us that it is so
because it is so
and she knows it
so she lays flat and lets the sky
steamroll her

nevermind not buying the ticket
or taking time off

some places you travel to alone

to accompany your flesh to the final door

you cross the threshold alone

How to: Assassinate the Subject

to assassinate a subject you must first study it

the speed at which it moves

where it lives

and what it uses to fill its home

verses and books

letters and weapons

you must be certain of what it is

and what it can become

caterpillar to butterfly

bullet to wound

how it loves and what

the subject is prone to metamorphosis

to growing wings and fluttering up

and around you

do not let it mingle

do not let it eat

if you have the time and the stomach

you may
with a blunt needle
and some thread
sew the subject's mouth
shut

الليلة الثانية

(The Second Night)

what are you reading?

a story

a story about love?

a story about love.

does it end with a wedding?

a sunset?

death in old age?

the sunset as a metaphor for the end?

we dream of a long time

we dream of now and later and whatever comes after,

and pray that there is a second night.

jidoo says we haven't the time to sit and weep for what has been lost

or wait to repent. By the time we hear the trumpet sound the earth will have cracked

and swallowed the prayer beads and books, and we will have forgotten the verses we

need to recite to plead to the almighty.

There's a Certain Twinkle in Her Eyes

there's a certain twinkle in her eyes
kohl in the waterline to contain the light
there's a certain finality in your phrases
unwavering faith in conclusions drawn
and a hand that searches
stretches outwards
& southward
there's skin on skin
certainly
burning with the heat of your blood
backseat leg cramped
beneath you
hiding from headlights
her burnt wood and leather
benzoin, bergamot and lavender
sins to carry for the both of you

The Artist

a commission is received
by the artist
a painting
*so it can be as though he is looking
at his reflection in his crystal mirror
to make immortal his brilliance*
something to
 h
 a
 n
 g
above the mantel

a portrait for the president's golden palace

a revolver is collected
by the artist
and wrapped in a silk scarf
*so that it can be as though she is looking
straight at him through
the linen fabric*
and she could place the end of
the weapon like a brush above the paint
carve a circle around the spot where a heart
should be

you'll find her
dragging his portrait
through the streets of baghdad
sand slipping through the hole in his chest

Muslim

mama and baba took us to see you
with pockets full of plastic wrapped gaz
we took the night train from mashhad
across the road from the cemetery for martyrs
and through the arched gate
that separates what moves and what is still

we etched the date into the wall you touched
with the sharp plastic end of
a blue ball point pen
and stepped on your neighbours as we departed
we sat at a round table in an empty restaurant down the street
I watched the chefs working with their heads bent
behind the counter

we were all puffy-eyed and silent

dad was shaking salt into his palm

الدعاء الأخير

لا يجب عليك أن تشهد الفجر

شروق الشمس

أنت وأنا

اللذان خُلِقنا من الطين

كائنات

بأطراف طويلة

أوعية جوفاء

قبل أن يمنحنا الروح

القدرة على الحب

عيوب البشر الحنينة

السماء تتقلب

من لون البحر إلا لون الدم

والشمس تنحدر

المسافة بيننا وبين الخالق

تضيق وتنهد

إنت الطير الأول

وهمسائك مثل المنشار

بها قوة تشق الصدر
وتصل ليدنين رحيمات
لقد كنت دائما محمولا باليد
وها انت تحس بها
ولا يرتد الدعاء مثل الصدى
انها تسقط وتستقر
انك واعى للكسور
للشقوق الصغيرة بسطحك
التي تمشي بنصفك
وتصبح قطعتين
فتحتضنك الأرض

فلا يجب عليك أن تشهد

فيض النور

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Glossary

abaya: a full-length outer garment

baba: father

thawb: an ankle-length robe

Yusifia: a province in Baghdad

Abeer: Arabic name, transl. to fragrance of flowers

ya: you or O, poetic exclamation

yasmeen: jasmine

narjis: narcissus

sahira: witch/sorceress

ك: the letter k in the Arabic alphabet

jidoo: grandfather

gaz: Iranian nougat

Mashhad: city in Iran