

Arabesque of Love

Maher Kheir

translated by

Raghid Nahhas

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Cover based on a painting by Hedar Abadi (a famous Iraqi artist who made this painting specifically for this poetry translation).
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Forword

My first readings of Maher Kheir's poetry had left me with the impression of a poet who had cinematographic abilities. I later, without surprise, learned that he pioneered Arabic poetry recitation using video clips. I attended some of his recitations and the production was a state-of-the-art theatre enjoyment. I am, however, biased to the effects of the pure words, the imagination they provoke and the natural reaction of a reader or listener not subjected to too much external technological influences. This is particularly important for translation.

When Maher Kheir asked me to translate his poetry into English, I felt that the challenge was to be able to convey his passion to the English reader as intended by a poet who had a lot of energy employed in every image he generated. The responsibility was great, but the challenge was very attractive.

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The first three poems translated here are from a forthcoming collection. The rest are selected from four collections published in Arabic as follows:

A Last Dance on Canberra's Lake, Dar Merit, Cairo 2008.

Sparrows of Nile Palace Bridge, Dar Merit, Cairo 2008.

A Sun for a Blue Shirt, Dar al-Jeel, Cairo 2005.

Naked under the Sun, Dar al-Farabi, Beirut 1998.

Raghid Nahhas

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Unpublished Poems

Roads in Our Palm

All roads are in our palm.
The river carries pebble faces.
Its water popples,
intensifying the river's ruddiness
on the slopes.

After death
anemones are born
on the banks.

A red rose lies at a distance,
an echo of a sun,
or a shadow of a star.

Sound languishes over water,
a white fish leaps.

We sleep apart in the evening,
only to meet here at dawn.
In another place,
somewhere,
meetings shatter.

Severing our hands is useless,
should we want to change
the thorny roads in our palm.

Our lips are abundant with
the aged juices of the vine.
Only those who truly accept
The Resurrection
shall drink.

Our eyes harbour a mirror
we once visited.
Our ears resound in echoes of
a sea we once crossed.
The nose smells of soil
we once trod upon
after a rainy night.
Our taste has the flavour of
our salty faces, soon after
a storm struck our harbour
one morning.

A Tear on a Clown's Cheek

When you are in the clouds
I am lighter than a straw,
but the wind is too weak to cast me
to your eyes.

What has become of the city after you?
Who would have believed
the sleeping blue lakes become bloodbaths?
My head is hung on a branch
and my heart is an owl wailing
for a passerby to shoot.

Our red apartment
bleeds ...
a soft tear
on a clown's cheek.

Haven't we concluded our game?
When my face disappears,
your face appears
a cat in the hand of a magician.
Pet cats become wild in your absence,
our wide green plains are now graveyards.

What Shall I Do with My Wings Now?

Absence.
My shadows,
thicker than our apartment's timber door,
flounder at the gate.
My eyes roam the space of our apartment,
blind bats.
Your forgotten ghosts adorn themselves
with the bloodred colour of our couch
to make me laugh once,
and once to laugh at me.
The walls swell similar to your chest
when it throbs with your heart beat
whenever I rest on it
a vagabond bird
towards the end of the evening.

What shall I do with my wings now?
I often promised them I would fly with you.
They grew larger than the clouds.
Now I understand the meaning of your departure.
I grasp the depth of this tragedy:
there is no difference between death and absence.

*A Last Dance
on Canberra's Lake*

The Blue Shirt

Goodbye ...
The lover departs.
The scarecrow boy walks
up to the river and drowns,
wearing the lover's
ragged blue shirt.

I Am Not Singing

I am not singing this morning.
It is my heart—made of cane:
whenever the wind blows,
it sobs and wails.

Dead Tales

When the chill lies
on expansive fringes
and the hills become
faces of our dead tales,
it pleases me to search
our memory's safes
to glimpse your face
as sunny as
the mornings
in Cairo.

A Drop of Your Heart

A drop of ink
and there shall be rivers
and the sea.

A drop of green
and there shall be palms
and meadows.

A drop of tears
and there shall be dawn
and the Sun.

A drop of your heart
and our home shall be
pretty and peaceful.

Twitch your eyes,
the windows shall open
for the sacred warm rain.

Walk barefooted,
whiteness shall furnish our place,
pelicans shall come laden with golden bracelets.

Recline a little:
half in water,
half in sand...
fish shall spawn
and lilies shall grow
on the banks.

Stretch your hand,
colours, shades and light shall intensify.
Speak, and let the world be.

Floating Cities

The lakes:
shattered glass.
The white pelican is not returning
to ask about her lover.
Nature has become a still-life painting.
The crows have become dumb children.

Who ignites the forests?
Who resurrects life?
Who stirs the sleeping lakes?

Since we separated and my eyes flooded,
lands have been drowning in darkness and
cities floating on my eyelids.

Snowman

As if the snowman had melted,
the mountains aborted,
the hills are a swing,
and the cities are stars
shed by the sky's eye.

It is only a single touch that
changed shapes and colours.
Oh no, not another touch!

What is happening to places?
What is happening to time?
I return a child wearing a blue apron,
running after distances,
counting faraway clouds,
creating in them imaginary faces:
a face of a giant
and a face of an angel.

I return a child wearing a blue apron,
collecting shells in his pocket,
making small boats from
the covers of his notebook,
conferring upon them fascinating names:
The Polar Star
The Golden Arrow
The Red Moon.

A child I return.
Secretly practicing his love of things,
kissing a doll to make it talk,
crying over a butterfly
whose wings he has
unintentionally damaged,
crying over a one-eyed stray cat,
over a bird that died.
I yearn for another touch!

A child I return.
There is life in returning.

Sunflower

The Sun is
a sunflower
falling...
One petal: yes,
we will meet again.
Another petal: no.
The last one is hung;
our fate in heaven.

Dancing under the Rain

Your eyes rain
over the window.
How lovely to dance
under the rain,
making the outdoors a fireplace
where we kindle
the flames of our hearts.

Broken Piano Keys

Are the piano keys broken,
or is it our fingers?
Is this a melody or a commotion?
Vases are smashed and
roses are slain on the floor.

This bed is a mass grave for
thousands of our dreams.
The pillow is a mere guillotine.
The face is rancid.
The eyes are two bottles of aged wine.
Come in, please.
Uncork the bottles, have a drink
or break them, dance
and laugh, but please
come in.

The door is a big silent mouth,
a burnt tongue,
an ear sniffing the rustling
of distant passers-by,
a nose buried in the wall,
a lover with a severed hand.
No one shakes hands.

The window is
a muted glass eye.
Or is it the gouged eye of the sun?
No light is visiting.

Silence.
No storm arrives.
No wind's gown is torn.
No apple falls.
No ghosts undress.
A wandering soul
meanders, asking:
'Where are my mirrors?'
The mirrors are hanging tinplates.

The Carnival's Night

As if you were
a night of fireworks!
Your lights colour my face,
but when they are extinguished
my face dies and my heart
hangs out and wanes.

As if you were
the carnival's night
bringing in bright stars,
good witches,
worshippers,
suns,
deities and
lovers who died for love.
I wish the night has not gone
and the carnival has not concluded.

I wish you did not
unmask your face to reveal
that the beautiful princess
was only a chameleon.

Rosella

What love has inflicted you
revealing the blood-red in
your feathers?

Rosella,
pass on my passion to a heart
that drenched me with love
and departed.

Reveal that the heart
that was once a willow
is now a straw.
And the world that used to rise
on the morning of myth
has not yet awoken.

Rosella,
remind them.
May memories benefit lovers.
Maybe.
Possibly.

Eleven Moons

Eleven moons and
the star and the sun weep.
Rain,
rain,
flood.
The lake overflows,
the city disappears,
a herd of deer falls and
my face drowns.
These are the lean years.
We no longer have
a throne, a crown or mace.
We no longer have
a prostrating light.

Is it true that
the wolf has devoured our son and
thrown the heart in the well?
Caravans after caravans passed by.

Death has
seduced me
from its true self.
I take leave of my *aziz*¹.
We have lost our love—
our beautiful child.

The shirt is torn.

¹ This is the Arabic term for both the word “beloved” and the Koranic king of Egypt associated with the story of Joseph.

The blue bleeds in black.
It is written that naked
I shall fall in love and
wash in my eye's water.
It is written that in blood
I seek a kiss.

Canberra,
who shall overturn myths and verses,
trade snow for a laughter and
sobbing for a golden light?
Dreams are a cut willow,
a cracked bridge over the lake
where ghosts pass.

Canberra,
ask Cairo
how many a planet
circled our orbits and
how often we
walked on water.

The sky is pieces
of paper
and moons.
One is burnt,
one is torn,
one is scarified and
one is creased.
Moon upon moon—
falling,
blazing,
abating,
over Canberra's Lake.

Naked

Slowly,
fire creeps into our garments.
It is difficult to be naked whilst
the others are watching you.
Our mouths are burning with thirst.
Flies wreck our faces.
Some throw acid at us to blind us
whilst they get drunk.
Woe unto you!
How long should this world sail in blood?
The knife is bigger than the hand.
The kiss is larger than the cheek.
The laugh is wider than the graves.

We Grew up One Morning

We were children,
every one in his beautiful home
in the old quarter
shaded by a palm tree.

The palm resisted
the rage of storms
and the cry of the winds.

We slept one night.
We grew up one morning.
We left dragging time behind us,
the palm of our old quarter
shining our path,
shedding light on our faces,
on our garments.
Oh God!
How beautiful palm trees are
in our land.

One city after another,
the palm nestles in our memory:
tirelessly singing,
brushing our hair,
flowing in our voice,
fluttering in our eyes
a minaret.
City after city:
Tripoli
Paris
Cairo
Canberra
I did not know the palm
would follow us
as far as here.

The Lake Dancer

Canberra—and snow falls in flakes.
A sole dancer on the lake:
the world narrows and
the sky slides in a crystal.
Suffocating space,
breathless air,
only a sphere of light is
left out of this universe, filled
with the breath of the dancer.
Snow and fog,
he paints pictures
with his movements.
The frost of waiting eats him up.
He ponders: what if
he tapped the crystal with his finger
and it fell in a drizzle?
What would thaw the ice
other than his tornado dance?

The frozen lake is a tear
suspended in his eyes,
a round white night or
a sour dream.

Around the crystal ball
people enjoy the dance of the sole lover.
He dances in honour of his lost love.
He shakes the trees of the petrified seasons
to reclaim the orange moons.
He shakes the star hung to the cheek of God
trying to provoke the angels
hidden behind rocks, trees and moons.

Whenever he breathes,
the scene becomes foggier.
Birth can happen in disguise
like revelation falling in secret,
like the manifestation of The Most Gracious.
He tries to make this dance
the Opening Chapter of the day:
he breathes more.
More mist,
more whiteness.
He tries to make the crystal
resemble a shining egg,
a gasp,
a throe,
to make it alive.

At midnight, the fog becomes
thicker than the threads of a cocoon,
the snow grows heavier.
The dancer crawls
over the lake's surface and
falls into a long slumber.
Deep down, he at last realizes
that no morning shall come.

Horses of Snow

Distances drop like a rock in water,
forming as many circles as
the roads they covered together,
and as many bright memories.
The snow horses rise out of slumber,
run over the sleeping lakes.
They burn.
The lakes collapse
and the horses fade.

They, alone, rise to the sky now;
two lovers shaking off snow
and embracing.

*Sparrows of the
Nile Palace Bridge*

The Cairo of Love

The Cairo¹ of love...
The Nile extends in me
until time bleeds
and the sands are ablaze.

This heart
is buried alive in a crippled darkness.
Horses ignite the chest of winds,
shatter like golden arrows.

This heart
crawls like snakes
in a swelter of
a midday.

High above
the dead crush the Sun's disk
with a dance, may the rain fall.
Would the rain fall?

What ploy does the fire have
against those pitch-black eyes?
What ploy does the soul have
against those thorny ribs?
An eye falls off its kohl.
A soul, when running away, bleeds.
Rain ... Rain ...
Have mercy on miserable lovers.

¹ Cairo is the English transliteration of Qahira, the actual Arabic name of this city. Qahira (for females and qahir for males) means "conqueror". "Cairo of love" here refers to Cairo as both the city and the "conqueror of love".

Close Your Eyes

Close your eyes and say:
'Between us are bubbles of light
whenever we touch each other
we spark.'

Close your eyes and say:
'The universe is ours.'
You will see how
you are born from me
and I from you.

Close your eyes and touch my hands,
you will see how
the day is born from
the skin of the night.

Close your eyes and blow your flute,
you will see brittle cities,
wrecked people and
bone remains of the world's kings.

Close your eyes and say:
'May God boost my passion.'

Nile Palace Bridge

I deluded the sky that
the coming summer is rainy,
the dry stream mirrors
lightning and promises.

Deep in the caves of my heart,
I light candles and weep,
imploping the sky not to
reveal my pretence.
Paradise locks its doors
in our faces.
The Nile Palace Bridge
cracks under our feet
and we witness the palace
collapse over our heads.

Only our two clasped hands
are left out of this world:
a dove in a molten cloud.

Don't Believe the River's Tears

These are not my features.
The river has no face, or eyes.
Don't believe
the river's tears.

These are not my fingers
combing trees on bridges.
This is not my hair flowing in flowers,
nor is it my breath exuding incense.

Don't believe the city's carnival,
its masked eyes,
honeyed voice,
tales, or
glassy tears.
Don't believe I loved it,
and that we became one,
then separated.

Don't believe I passed here.
Don't believe my shadow.
Love has never shone on me,
nor did it spill my echo over the world.
Don't believe my steps,
or my cloudy hands.
This is a hallucinating time
greeting us.

The Dance of the Mummy

We did not sleep...
Our night was not white.
The blue star did not
flash our balcony.
The red rose did not
spring from our pillow.
We were two frightened
lost children in
the strangers' night.
All our nights are similar.
The black statues undress
in our home.
They walk on their toes,
blow their muted horns,
spill the lilac lamps,
float in space
over the wooden piano,
suffocating the skillful player,
suspending him over
the musical scale,
throwing dried tears at him,
dancing their mummy dance.

If Only We Had Enough Colours

We embrace ...
as if we were exchanging condolences.
May Allah have mercy on
what was between us.
Our glass is broken and
the moon dies injured on the window.

Our sky is a closed garden.
Our fingers are rusted wires.
The bleeding of the clouds
has just ceased.

If only we had enough colours
to finish the painting.

There are water and a swing in the cage
and a bird that has stopped singing.
This heart is blind with sadness.
Farewell all wishes.

Violet Haemorrhage

For your eyes,
the sea recites its wound.
The tears of oysters are
ink to thousands of tales:
a violet haemorrhage glowing,
and the lover is a prince who
never dies.

For your eyes,
the sand palaces become water,
the waves a musical scale,
climbed by passionate spirits and gods.

The Nile's Wound

Whenever we part,
dust fills the world:
the clamor of summer is
the wailing of the wind at the window.
Crowds of people on bridges
scatter like yellow leaves.

This heart is The Nile's wound
splitting the city in two:
one half is you and
the other is your shadow.

The river's banks are
moving sorrows.
The sun is a red snowball,
whenever we long for each other,
it floods the city with blood.

The Swing of Love Is Falling

I know ...
The end of the journey
can only take one old tree
imploing the tears of the sky
every evening.

I know ...
When all the children surly grow up
there will be no room for them to play
in its shadow again.

I know ...
All lovers are departing
with fingers trembling
as cold as stones.

I know ...
The swing of love
is falling and
the heart is a graveyard.

I know ...
I embrace you
and sob.

Oh Sea, Be My Witness!

The jellyfish, the lamps of the sea, are
extinguished lanterns.
The fish are coloured stones
covered by sand.

The bewildered fisherman has returned.
His hands are
two pieces,
two oars.
His eyes reveal
a scorching sun
and two tears.

Oh sea, be my witness!
Prostrating in a prayer of dreams,
the fisherman's knees broke.

Oh sea, be my witness!
The universe's vast bed
is only large enough
for one sleep.

The Face of Time

An abundance of tales—
too many for lines to handle.
Enough!

Words amass in her forehead,
letters swarm her face
crowding her cheeks: the roses of hope.
Her eyes mirror
infants crawling,
girls glamorously chatting,
boys playing,
weddings flourishing and
an old woman kneeling at a door,
patching a shroud of a dream.
Her mouth is a valley,
her nose is a mountain.
Pity on this face weary
of the beat of time.

The Dance of the Infatuated Spirits

Ghosts impel
this sleeping palace
where spirits dwell.

Don't come closer . . .
The eyes of the mirrors,
silken curtains and
silver lanterns of tears
recite a thousand tale.
The window sills host
pigeons,
doves,
cooing,
and a blue cage
for a petrified bird
still singing.
Dried roses exude perfume
and mask the palace away.

Don't come closer . . .
A curse might befall you.
The perfume of passionate lovers is
a stab in the heart.
This sleeping palace hosts
spirits madly in love.
Don't come closer.

Midnight ...
Sleeping objects awake.
Faces spout with the fountains' water.
Candles glow.
Glasses overflow with the blood of lovers.
Closed-eyed statues walk,
carrying their torches along colonnades,
opening long hallways.
The small temple inflames.
The guards beat their drums.
Halleluiahs fill the place.
A princess suddenly forms,
once as a cloud,
once as light.
She advances to him,
kisses his lips.
The prince rises.
They dance together
until the last breath of night.

Don't come closer ...
Wash first with the water of lovers,
and naked you shall leave your world.
Enter with a white heart
and a white forehead.
At midnight, dance ...
The dance of infatuated spirits.

Our Arabesque Window

Our arabesque window is closed.
Pigeons visit its edges,
only to weep.

Our door is shut,
our television is turned off,
our phone is disconnected
and there is no glow in our lamp.

Darkness.
Our piano has received a blow.
It rests its head on its wooden arm.

Silence . . .
A ghost walks on the wall,
touching the white fingers
by a tune you like
and the curtains dance.

An echo of distant steps
cracks this home.
Is it you, my beloved,
returning and you have just left?

The Harp Player

Your palm glows in mine.
Suffice The Nile to
overflow with lotus
to conceal entire cities.

You and I are
a queen and a king
over this entire world.
Whenever we cast
our shadows over the temples,
the inscriptions on their walls flourish
and the harp player
escapes her mural like a cloud,
awakening the wind,
brushing the trees and
letting moons flower on their branches.
She recites the song of love at dawn,
sprinkles roses in the river then
throws her heart for our glory
and the glory of love
and lovers.

Inscribed on My Skin

Is it good bye?
Can the last Pharaonic god die?
The gilded masks
and the statues
suddenly drop.
The city is an ember
ablaze in the eye.
We must be blind
to say good bye.

Take no notice,
the sparrows shall
drink The Nile complete.
Woe to all fishermen—
all those who cast a net
in our waters.
Our dreams are baits in
the throats of the enviers.

Cairo is inscribed on my skin
like a hieroglyphic song
in an undiscovered shrine.
I fear to walk under
the sun or in the rain,
lest the song thaws
and the human crowds
scavenge the shrine.

But tomorrow, I return.
My path is ladders
descending
towards a golden tomb.

Our meeting is a sacrifice offered
at the moment of worship.
Our departure is the echo of bats
in abandoned temples.

An Apple

A gate,
a passage to another gate,
many passages and
countless gates.
The passers-by became trees,
and the heart of the lover fell:
an apple.

No Intercessor for Our Love

Our love has no intercessor.
Go closed-eyes,
possibly to the abyss.

The round sun disk smashed
like a cup from which
we had sipped coffee
on our first evening,
in an old café lost in the crowd.
It slipped off our trembling hands
and broke.

There are blood spots on
the roads we walked one evening.
They tried to come off the ground
and rush for our farewell.

A child slaughtered his mother
and a saint over there hung his head high.
We part and he does not intercede.

A Memory over Cairo

I did not know
that the "Red Hill"
moves ...
Whenever you open your eyes,
it sighs laughing.
Whenever you close them,
silence prevails.

I did not know
that the sweet scent
occupying the city
is your breath,
and your touch lasts
under my skin.

The faces were mere dust
to our indifferent red eyes.
The bridges in Cairo are
a narrow path for our ascent to
a suspended cloud.
Our rendezvous was grander
than a god's funeral.
We shed tears enough
for thousands of orphans.
The Nile was blinded
with weeping and lost its course.
Yet, this was not a farewell.

Our Days on the Nile

It was glowing with lights ...
carrying passengers,
violin players and
lovers
taking pictures,
laughing.

On our last farewell night,
from our weeping café on the Nile,
you carried us as if
we were on top of the mast and
descending.

Was it really a boat
or a cloud?
It dispersed and
we faded.

A Sun for a Blue Shirt

Laced Memory

My memory is no longer a virgin.
It has a thousand lovers.
It has been divorced
many times and widowed.
Neither a child
asks about her
nor a family.
Without passion, naked,
it receives many visitors,
covered only with a lace of sorrows.
It pours tea in cups and
fire on dresses.
It unsheathes swords of flutes,
to dance the dance of the dead
and die out.

A Toast

I wish I could see
a minaret weeping
at the evening's door.
I also crave to land in Beirut
even amidst its sorrows and losses.
Alone, I have spent a whole year
banging one glass against the other:
my memory and my heart—
Drinking!

Haemorrhage over the Seine

Only my shadow remains
cast in specters over the river.
My hair droops like willows and
my hands are flowers.
My wound flows as thin as
the dawn's tears.
A passer-by says:
'The river is happy today.'

My eyes float atop the river,
glittering splinters.
Let it be known:
it is a sign of my soul's yearning
whenever the river floods.

The river turns red.
The sea gulls arrive every morning
I feed them with my mouth.
They alone know the taste of wounds.
They alone know the colour of my blood.

My wound is bleeding in Paris.
The river of Paris is from me.
Without my blood,
the river would not sing.

Every bird in Paris has a tale
to tell the world about me.
Paris is mine.
Paris is mine.
Her light's prayers flow with my tears.
Her night is cast off my shadow.
Who dares steal Paris from me?

Two Faces

Our city has two faces:
you and I.
People see us
at all times.

Moon Flakes

My memory was frail,
yellow-faced, tired and
sleeping with a smile.
My memory has never slept
since eternity.
The night visited her
in her bed,
lit her lantern,
emptied his pockets
of travel gifts:
an extinguished sun disk and
moon flakes.
At the station, he forgot
the sleeping tablets of dreams and
the pills of love and kisses.

The Destiny of Lovers

Threads of destiny,
never torn or worn,
tie us together
defying the wind of time.

I now know what is between you and me:
one of us is a butterfly,
one is a light.
No lamp broke,
no wing burned.

I now know what is between you and me:
vast expanse and
birds in the sky.
One of us is morning,
the other is evening.

I now know what is between you and me:
childhood dreams and
ghosts, with unknown faces,
knocking on our doors.
We don't know how
our tomorrow will loom.
We don't know how
our past came.
All we know is that
we are a burning tune,
a bleeding desire.
My friend, we have no choice.
This is the destiny of lovers.

Whenever We Touch

As if you were my face in the mirror.
As if I were your reflection in water.
Whenever we touch
your face vanishes and
my face breaks.

I Forgot My Face

I forgot
my face
in your mirrors.
I walk
and don't see any one,
no one sees me.
I am content
when you look
in them
you see me.

The Gardens of Light

Every night,
I farewell my body
in its deathbed.
I sneak on my toes
to the gardens of light.
I go through
long white walkways and
pass many trees and a bridge
pounding with fire and water.
A blue lake,
spilling with stars,
lies at the border of the gardens.
The moon at its edge,
undressed and reclined,
waiting.
Every night,
it arrives right on time.
We swim together,
eat together
the apple of radiant love.

Naked under the Sun

In Praise of the Coming Generation

I wear the face of the mountain
and embrace the face of the sea,
together we weep our
assassinated brothers
and our loved ones who have departed.
I become an ocean
tearing the faces of the alien tents
on your cheerless shore.
I curse them.
I glorify the passage of time.
I wear your sun.
My sweat is your clouds.
My singing is rain
on your land.

I wear the face of the ancient cedars,
tears of generations cleanse me
bedewing the branches.
I smile thunder... and
I recite: 'In the name of Allah,
Most Gracious, Most Merciful.'
I supplicate
I pray...
in praise of
the coming generation.

The Horse of Dreams

Our horse of dreams
has become a wooden horse
on which I swing
every evening.

Its red rage has
anchored in my head.
The horse has forgotten its neighing.
I neigh every night instead,
hoping it will grow wings.

Together we fly,
and time flies with us
to reach a different place
every night.

We live a strange tale
in which your kisses become
magic lamps:
'Abracadabra,
your wish is my command.'
I kiss my goddess.
Your fingers are idols.

Dancing on the Eyelash of the Universe

I love you.
Tears become pearls.
Dry lips become cherries.
Barren eyes become an oasis.
Eyelashes become sparrows' nests.
The heart flutters... and flies.

I love you.
My skin relents and
becomes roses.
My hair flows and flowers.
I break forth like the dawn.
I diffuse like the morning.

I love you.
My fingertips spatter stars.
Suns nestle inside me.
Angels play.
The 'ah' sings.
The goddess swings
and Allah laughs.

I love you.
Fairies emerge
from childhood books.
Mermaids and
rock pearls emit
mysterious lights.

I love you.
Rain flows.
Trees spread on the land.
Suns bathe in me.
A rainbow smears my eyes like kohl.

Before you,
I used to dream of
light, flowers and colour.
Your love carried me
out of my cocoon to dance on
the eyelash of the universe.

I Love to Die in Your Eyes

When I am in love with you,
autumn and winter resign from
the cycle of seasons and
my heart takes on
the profession of drumming.

When I am in love with you,
my life dances on glass,
my fragrance is white roses and blood
I exude amid sniffs and embraces.

When I am in love with you,
my eyes cheer like Red Indians.
They call you, sing you,
appease you and make you their prayer.

When I am in love with you,
I fear not what is left of my days
and I love to die in your eyes.
Death in them is a resurrection!

When I am in love with you,
the sparrows carry me on their wings
and receive me in their nests.
The Sun grants me his address.
The stars award me their rotations.

When I am in love with you,
the breeze bestows its breath upon me.
The rivers, their flow.
The shores, their dreams.

Your love is eternal:
I loved you
before I was born.

The sun is a wink
of your eyes.
Your lips are a link
between heaven and earth.
The world adjusts its clock
on the beat of your heart.

Love's Farewell

Yesterday you said 'adieu', my love.
My feet now have the tread of elephants
and I was as light as a butterfly,
as delicate as a sparrow.

Yesterday you said 'adieu', my love.
My dreams now have walls and locks
and I was as free as the wind,
as boundless as the light.

Yesterday you said 'adieu', my love.
Yesterday, I was so tall
my head could touch the clouds,
my fingers could toy with the sun,
I could turn it off and on at will
and throw it wherever I wanted.

Yesterday you said 'adieu', my love.
How splendid I was yesterday...
I could cross the lines of fire and
walk over seas of water.

Your Eyes Are My Favourite Book

Your eyes are my favourite book.
A book without a title!
Whenever they twitch,
they invite me: 'Please come on.'
'Read in the name of love.'
'Read in the name of affection.'

Your eyes are a tranquil mixture of
the clouds of happiness
and the light of sorrow.
I shall write in them
incredible words,
chanted and applauded.

Words painted on all lips,
and people shall ask:
'Who is this poet?'
'Isn't he a lord, or a god?'

I Live by the Grace of Your Eyes

I live by the grace of your eyes
where galaxies turn
like the dervishes' dance,
rivers flow,
seas flood and
the morning emerge from
behind your eyelashes.

Your eyes sing with
masterly charm and secrets:
if Allah saw them,
He would close the gates of heaven
and make your eyes His paradise!

Naked under the Sun

Back there
where all is forbidden,
where hope is a fragment
and dreams are subservience,
I am not considering a return.

I want to run naked
under the sun,
under the sky.
I want to be bare of
clothes, people or belongings.
I want to be a horse without a saddle,
with hoofs of poetry,
never going astray.

I want to inscribe your love
on the golden sun.
I want my voice to be neighing,
not mumbling or whispering.

I want my steps
to be redolent of light.
I want my love to be a fire lily,
strings ablaze with song.

I don't want my neighing to be words implied,
I want it to glow and strike.
I want my wings to
slap the face of the wind,
cross every boundary and line,
set free every captive and
embrace the injured.

Sparrows Shall Rip the Heaven's Chest

This evening
sparrows shall rip the heaven's chest.
They shall erupt, of sadness,
beyond the frontiers of silence
and the letters of the alphabet.
They shall sing their tune of hope.

Our life has become tight,
the sky is closing in,
our steps are heavy,
our ideas are clogged in our shoe heels.
Our voices rot inside our throats,
our dreams have lost their glow,
our existence has lost its shadow.

Our mouth has been fed on the 'Ah'
and it still sings.
The heart's wings have been clipped
and it still sings.

Who hears its sorrows?
It still sings...
A bird that has lost its shore.

Light carried its briefcase and went.
A voice called it and an echo replied:
'Sing for me...
the time of oppression has not passed yet.'

Oh my green bird!
Come and sob
on my hand.
Oh my green bird!
Come and drink
from my eyes.
Sing for me
and continue to sing.
Their ears might be grassy,
but they are not deaf.
Surely, someone would respond—
sing for me.

Would the two Rocks Meet?

And I return to Beirut,
to the goodness of Beirut
and her estrangement.

I return to loiter
amidst her traffic jams and
street dust.
I return to my daily preoccupations,
my foolish life dreams.
My heart is a ruby necklace
breaking up and scattering
over public squares.

I return to Beirut
to embrace wide eyes and
broad spans of sadness.

I return trying to sketch a new city
where I shed myself as a blue light.
I try to draw a dawn, a sun, a sea and
a boat with which I cross
the seas of grief
without drowning.

No pen consents to me.
No paper consoles me.
No tear comforts me.
No poetry cures me.
Have we lost the bliss of sobbing
and the bliss of poetry here?

Why do I both love and hate this city?
Why am I always fond of Paris,
Toulouse, Bordeaux, Montpellier,
Cannes, Monaco and Nice?

My heart is split in two
like Beirut's Pigeon Rocks.
How can I escape my schism
between east and west?
Would the two rocks one day meet
and the mind marry the heart?

A Secret Letter from Beirut

Every evening
I write to you tight-spirited
and you have timidly and secretly
infiltrated my soul,
afraid of some eye,
some mouth or gossip.
Why shouldn't I reveal you?
Why should you remain
my invisible ink?
It is so willed.
What a will!

Every evening
I sneak through lobbies of silence and moaning
to touch your forbidden body,
your frozen hands and
your apprehensive, perplexed, bewildered eyes.

Every evening
we light the fire in fear and
promptly put it out with regret.
We spend the remnants of time
inflamed by its extinguished memories
and we never die out.

Every evening
a shiver befalls us
and we cry on the other bank
of the tears' river where
no one can see.

Every evening
we embrace and
stick together to
scream,
reject,
rebel,
defy...

Every evening
we turn on the red light and break it.
We turn on the orange light and veil it.
We turn on the green light and forget it.

Every evening
I call you: 'Beloved,'
so that the bed rages,
the room burns,
the street glows,
the city scatters and
the world is disgraced.

Every evening
flowers dance at our place,
the mirrors talk,
the curtains sing and
the bed moves us to
a sea of lilac and
floats a bit,
soars over Beirut,
through white clouds,
then touches down on
the lucid moon.

Every evening
you print on my lips
heavenly songs.
Your kiss is saying a prayer.

Every evening
I open your eyes and read.
I open your hands and hum.
I open your chest and prostrate.
You open your heart and I praise.

Every evening
You call me: 'Beloved,'
birds rush to our veranda,
butterflies flutter their wings
around our soft violet light and
they never stop.

Every evening
my eyes give birth to you and
your eyes give birth to me.
We grow together
beyond the years,
beyond life,
beyond time.
We grow together
beyond deaf pillars or
blind domes,
beyond life and
the afterlife.

Why shouldn't I reveal you?
Why should you remain
my secret ink and
enigmatic sickle?
Why should you be
an exclamation sword
on my chest?
Why is Beirut drowned
in a black cloak,
strangling us by its trails?

Why is Beirut veiled,
lying in wait for us
in her long vestibules,
dark tunnels,
narrow lanes,
suffocating shores and
concealing us
behind her high bars
forever?

Beirut is not fair to her lovers,
never liberates them.
My darling be fair to me every evening.
Set me free every evening:
to the dawn,
to the sun and
to beyond the sky.
Don't remain my
invisible ink.