

## Listening is Made for the Ashen Sky: Four Poems

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### *The Glistening*

There are mountains  
that savor the sun at the end of day,  
a sun drawn from the blurred bludgeoned  
belly of the East,  
spilling bleeding streaks of exile  
across the rocks.

There are mountains  
that breathe the white light of autumn  
into hospitals  
where the comfort of swollen strangers  
is a reunion with love.

In the dark, worn-out night,  
mountains drip secret layers of perfumed mist  
into the cheeks of young girls  
and the moon is a solitary man  
who waits in anguish  
for the unveiling of violet courtyards  
hidden just beneath the mountain tops.

Restless breathing mountains of the East,  
enclosed in swells of desert light  
tumble down, like moving hymns  
into the waiting lips of occupied people  
creating the giant hush  
of an earthen resistance.

Bountiful mountains of the West  
hum softly into blue slumber  
and rise past the valleys strewn  
with the roots of wide-eyed children

creating the deep gnawing of love,  
a love which makes you want to leave your skin behind.

And where is that mountain  
the prophet prayed for  
to separate Mecca from its enemies,  
that yellow mountain, face of black,  
meteor of heaven?  
I want to find that mountain  
that will fold us inward slowly, that infinitely laboring  
bald, beautiful mountain,  
enemy of melancholy, ally of life  
glistening darkly  
in silence.

## *Blue*

*The breeze that came down from over the hills was no longer...*

Begin with your last gaze on the morning of your first departure, your boyhood room in the dawn light, you combing your hair and staring out the window at the sunken city of Jaffa, *Bride of the Sea*.

There's the map composed on a white napkin that you hand to your children—*walk six blocks back from the sea*—the house later found behind a façade of ancient sepia, and Donna says "This must be Tata's house."

Only in your dreams does your trembling return. You say the sea will no longer cast its veined net of blue on a city of absent inhabitants.

Before we cross the bridge, you tell me of Omar's rapturous mythic heart—galloping in silence.

"When we first arrived at the dock, the gray-blue waves were large hills that opened to a thrumming sky, the sea swallowing the small boat, the big boat beckoning, but the sea would not take us across to Lebanon that day; its secret voice kept crying out to me: *Freedom is land.*"

"Let's go to Nablus," Hind said, "There's a house there..."

Begin again with the Tennessee Walking Horse. She rode it regally at Little Daddy's Texas ranch, her back straight, her golden hair like an emissary of no known sun, her blue eyes unlike Mediterranean blue.

"I loved her since with all the darkness of my veins. Before I bought her a horse, I remember how I sold cigarettes in the streets of Nablus. I bought Hind her first bra, and when I sold an entire pack, we ate lamb instead of vegetables."

On the morning of your first departure, loudspeakers blared news of pregnant women with bayoneted bellies, *and the dawn was no longer dawn, and the breeze was no longer.*

"Does that man with the restaurant on the water still serve fried fish with lousy tahini?"

Omar sobs on the bus back to Jordan. The settlements gallop towards him; from over the hills, he feels a choking. Donna says the blue of Palestinian pottery is unlike a blue she's ever seen.

You wait for us across the bridge with borderless sandwiches, the sea forever snatched from your eyes.

*Morning's Opal*

Here is the light loosening through dawn-colored leaves.  
It makes its way past a rootless morning that resembles,

in its sever of bird song and scent of old-wood smoke,  
every place and no place we know. You point

at those roots resting beneath the enormous Aleppo pine  
and say they are the ancient calligraphy aging on mosque corridors.

You say roots are leaping market places sprawling in a thousand directions,  
and those wrinkles emanating endlessly from my forehead.

And what of roots we find in small hands, beneath big feet,  
all succumbing to an earth that leans inward and opens to a sky

withdrawn from stars? Here, we yellow when we think of our dead,  
and we grow large with rootlessness, although our blossoming is born.

And I wonder: what kind of hunger is it,  
our bathing in the mist of all this orange light?

### *The Emptying*

Whenever we buried the sun's palm  
in our mothers' eyes  
my grandmother would quote the Prophet,  
the white butterfly in her voice  
draging over red-haired grass:  
*paradise is under the feet  
of your mothers.*

She never wanted to bury our mothers  
each in a country  
under a sky that hung the eye of envy,  
its heavy arrow darting  
towards them through the years.

We only wanted to be there at the beginning  
when she rode her donkey to school,  
Jerusalem's golden Dome padlocked  
in the black mink of her hair,  
and when she lamented a love poem by Byron,  
and later when she lined up her daughters  
in front of a mirror: *You are not as beautiful  
as others, but your eyes are like the long rays of the sun.*

Those summers she reclaimed the sun  
with eyes like giant cups of dew  
swaying beneath the blue-green spruce,  
as we tumbled at her feet  
listening to her stories of lustrous djins,  
who hide the earrings of little girls.

She said the angel of death  
would arrive disguised as the eye of fog  
to escort those post-amber, sulky souls,  
and that he would carry a lantern so sooted  
that even the sun could not cleanse.

*Is all beauty promised to darkness?*  
we asked in oblivion,  
as we slipped on the delicate skulls  
of her warnings, and our eyes kept

on netting larger questions:  
*How does the body empty the spirit  
when the time comes?*

*Does the air smell like sun  
and muslin when you die?*  
We never caught the answers  
as she gathered us in bunches,  
and we curled towards her  
like sunflowers before dawn  
shivering beneath the haul  
of those gusty beings.

*Note*

The line “because beauty promised to darkness” is from Susan Terris’s poem  
*Fallen Light*.