

fall/winter 2019

arts & literature

aftab



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Cover photo by Syed Husain
Field in Quebec, Canada
Shot on Sony a7

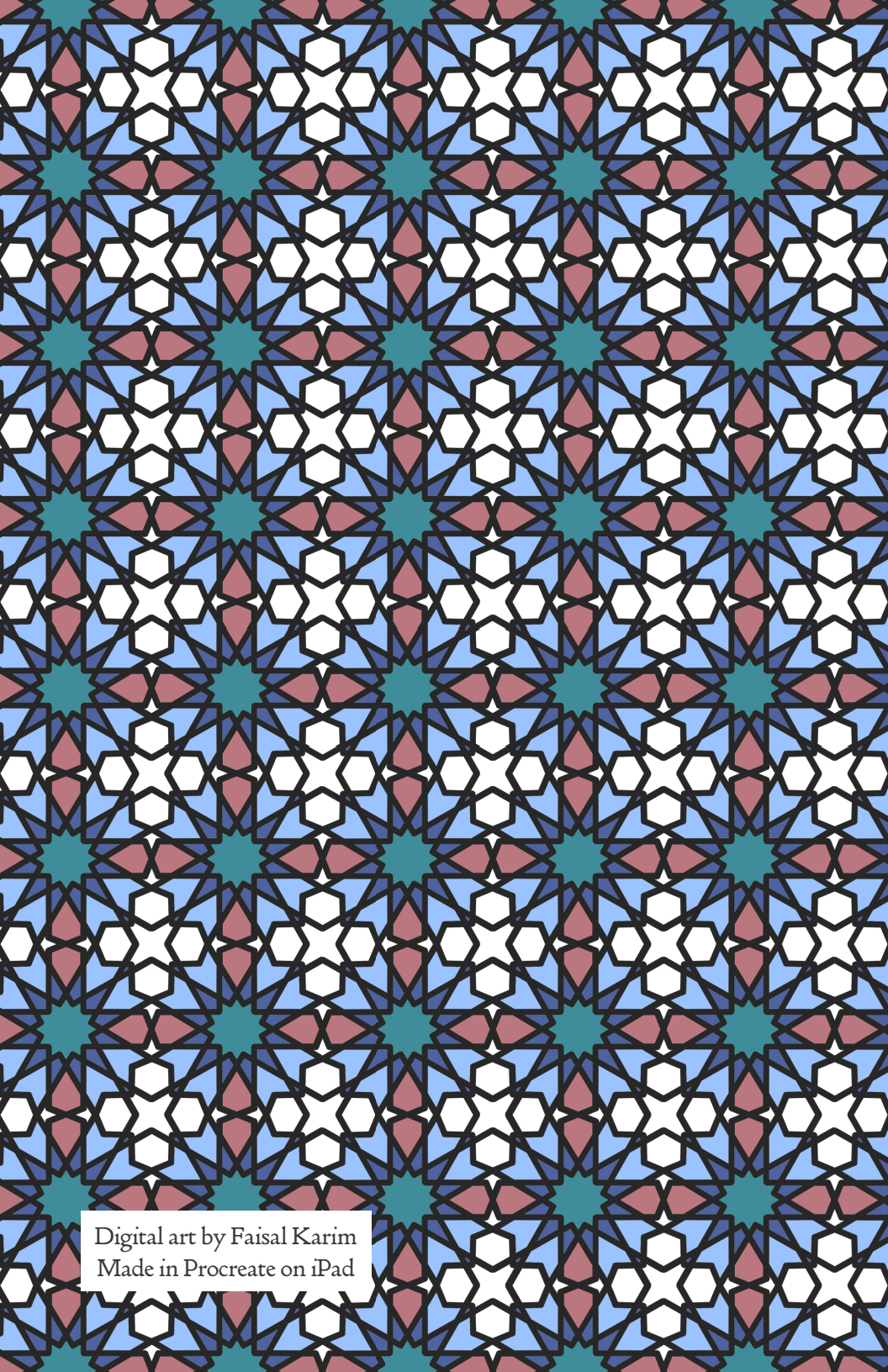
Contents

- 5 Note from Aftab
 – *Yahya Khan*
- 7 Knowledge
 – *The Wholesome Poet*
- 8 Like Moths to a Flame
 – *Danya Jafri*
- 11 Untitled
 – *Rida Ali*
- 12 Portraits
 – *Ayman Siam*
- 14 Black and Gold
 – *Linda W. Kamau*
- 15 A Woman, Healing
 – *Nadia Hussein*
- 20 Lost
 – *Hawa Kebbeh*
- 22 They Ask Us Who We Are
 – *Rida Ali*



- 24 Your Night
 – *S.E. Faiz*
- 27 Clichés of death
 – *Khalid Abu Dawas*
- 28 A Momentary Interruption
 – *Yahya Khan*
- 30 Wallets
 – *The Wholesome Poet*
- 33 A Self Portrait
 – *Khalid Abu Dawas*
- 36 Staff

Photo by Zeina Smith
Lake Mohave, Arizona
Shot on iPhone SE



Digital art by Faisal Karim
Made in Procreate on iPad

Dear Readers of Aftab,

Aftab's history has been one of relentless strife. For years, Aftab has served as a creative outlet for artists, students, and community members in the NYU and ICNYU communities. In past issues, we have met different cultures, identities, and stories of emotional experiences and spiritual journeys.

Over the years, the magazine has resurrected itself, each time promising to kindle the spark of its creativity. As time passes, the world changes and adapts and we are faced with new challenges in creative expression. Like its contributors, Aftab has scoured every creative corner to call home. In the end, we cannot "fit" anywhere. And perhaps this is the most frustrating rite of art. But we at Aftab take pride in this friction.

Enclosed you will find words gnashing against the pages, grazing your fingertips with haunting scars. You may find your heart stained with watermarks of the printed images. The pieces presented in this issue capture the struggle and growth each and every one of us faces, and the result is art that speaks our words for us and tells our stories.

The team at Aftab proudly presents to you narratives of identity and explorations of culture, each gently plucked from our brave and talented contributors. Their stories, we hope, will illuminate not only discussions of art, but also foster recognition and appreciation for experiences of all kinds.

Please enjoy the Fall 2019 edition of Aftab, in all of its misfit glory.

- Yahya Khan
Creative Head


A photograph of a mosque with minarets and a palm tree against a blue sky with white clouds. The mosque is in the foreground, and the sky is filled with large, fluffy white clouds. A palm tree is visible on the left side of the frame. The minarets are tall and slender, with golden domes at the top. The sky is a deep blue, and the clouds are bright white. The overall scene is peaceful and serene.

Photo by Tamim Islam
Makkah, Saudi Arabia
Shot on iPhone 7

Knowledge

- The Wholesome Poet

Let the ink run,
Let it form letters
Let the letters form words
Let the words form papers
Let the papers form books

for knowledge remains residual
in the books that outlast authors
for power thrives within
those holding firm their books
not allowing temporary temptations
erode the eternal beauty
they are blessed to carry

Keep searching for knowledge
For if you do,
Your ink will never dry

Like Moths to a Flame

- Danya Jafri

It's a daunting concept— trying to find yourself, your place, your sense of belonging in this complicated and trying world. We are beings trying to uncover what remains behind the smoke and mirrors, trying to find ourselves amidst the increasingly blurring lines of *belonging* and *not belonging*, of feeling *at home* and feeling *lost*.

Attempting to navigate this world, I begin to piece together this mosaic of being *human*, this puzzling yet beautiful art we find within ourselves, our extraordinarily unique and intriguing selves. We, *marginalized, alienated, othered* group of people are diamonds in the rough— we shine and sparkle amidst even the darkest of nature's blows. We are the *revolution*. We are the *new*, the *different*, the *unheard*, but within us there is a *spark* that ignites a flame that guides us along this transitional phase we call *life*.

So we must let revolution become our *sanctuary*, so we can join hands in humanity, and find *the light within*. Let us embrace in *solidarity* and find *solace* in one another's unfinished quests to find a place amongst ourselves which we call *home*.

Let us embark. Like moths to a flame, let us embark on a journey of *love*.

Photo by Omar Hmimy
Sunset in New York
Shot on iPhone 8

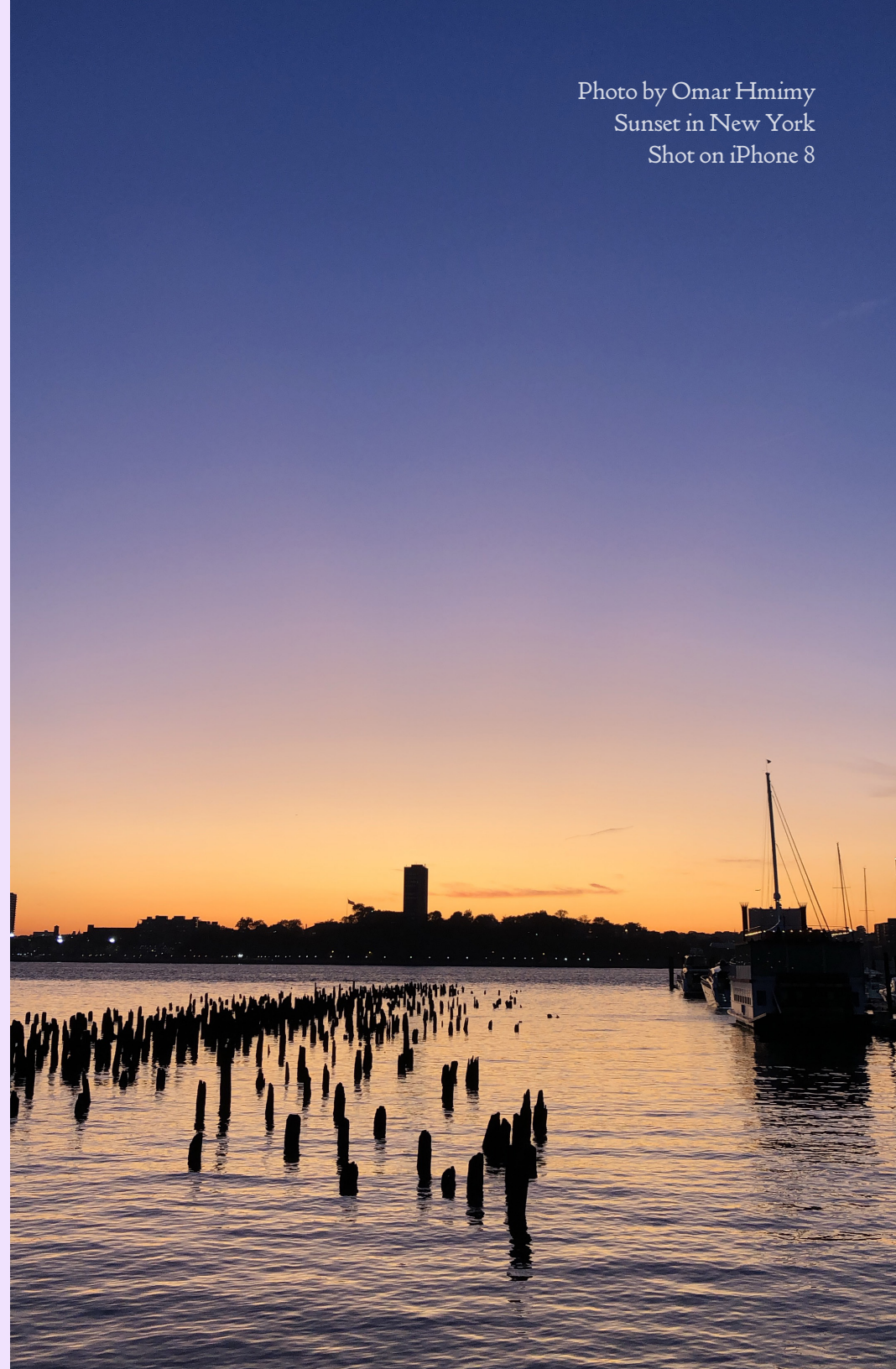




Photo by Syed Husain
Forest in Vermont
Shot on Sony a7

Untitled

- Rida Ali

And then you came,
Like every natural disaster I could think of;
Uprooting the cities
inside of me that
I did not know I had.
Shaking my insides with
lightning strikes.
Causing the buildings to fall down.
You were a
forest fire
expanding beyond the forest
and into the villages
Destroying the whole universe
that I encompassed.
But soon the wind began
to slow down,
Everything was left shattered.
The tornados and
forest fires and
tsunamis and
earthquakes all faded.
I was left with a civilization unable to stand on its own.
It was all gone.
And yet,
Even after all of that.
If your natural disaster ever
came back,
I would be waiting for it.

Portraits

By Ayman Siam
Shot on Nikon D5700



Brotherhood



Unsilenced



Culture



Bond



Power



Black and Gold

By Linda W. Kamau
Digital Illustration

"This series of illustrations is part of a collection called Black and Gold, which is a series dedicated to the beauty of the black female form."

A Woman, Healing

- Nadia Hussein

At the heart of every social issue is the presence of pain. The pain of a right denied, an expectation unmet, a connection severed, a life unfulfilled. The violence of power, privilege, and abuse that inflicts it all. The human impact on body, mind, and soul of toxic ideologies and hateful actions. The intricacies and intersectionality of our identities subjecting us to all kinds of issues at once.

This is not just a story about a social issue.

This is a story about the human impact. The pain endured.

This is just part of my story as a woman, healing.

Take the idea that one's worth as a woman is rooted in her relationship to a man, or to the very existence of men in her life. This concept in and of itself is perhaps not entirely new in circles of feminist thought and a fairly simple understanding of misogyny and manifestation of the heteronormative patriarchy pervasive in many of the spaces and contexts we occupy.

However, to tie to this large, somewhat theoretical, concept to one's personal life is a completely different thought exercise. To read and understand how these structures of power, abuse, and positionality function has always been easy for me as an academic. But to more comprehensively delve into how these normative elements of socialization present in my own life and have affected my personal worldview requires a distinct level of honesty and depth in introspection.

For the longest time, I couldn't see a future for myself without marriage. Every variation or permutation of my future career plans, life goals, travel, or places to live all integrated in some way the fact that I would be married. There is no doubt this was heavily influenced by the people surrounding me instilling this ideal.

My mother telling me she's happy I'm ready to get married when I helped her make roti as a child.

The "So when are you gonna get married?" questions that undoubtedly show up at every family function since I went off to college. Never followed by any questions pertaining to my education, by the way.

In that way, I was constantly assuming that this was something that would always just happen in life. That it's somehow inherent, inevitable, and in this way necessary.

This may not seem so monumental- for marriage to be a heavily enforced societal and cultural norm. However, what's significant about this observation is that the necessity of it all was never grounded in a value or prioritization for life-long emotional or spiritual health or fulfillment. Rather, the necessity of marriage finds its roots deeply in the idea that a woman's human value, honor, dignity, deserved respect lies in their marital status. The intentionality of this structure actively grants space for the pain and violence of power over women to be pursued to the end of upholding those constructed values. Within this framework there exists no value for health, no value for the prevention of pain.

However, this idealization of marriage was not the only narrative I was being fed. As the daughter of a single mom, I was also constantly instilled with the idea of the strong, independent woman- getting stuff done and living life without the help of anyone- much less, any man.

Seemingly, I believed for a long part of my life that this mindset was enough to counteract that preexisting patriarchal framework that causes long-term misogynistic abuse and degradation in the name of reifying power and perpetuating hatred. That the success story of my single mom raising her kids, all daughters, on her own and picking herself up after divorce- that that story was somehow a living testament to the flaws and inadequacies of patriarchy. A prime example of a healthy alternative.

But as I grew up, I quickly learned differently.

Specifically- the frameworks of patriarchy and misogyny could never quite escape from that of the strong, independent woman. Patriarchy and misogyny remain pervasive within her, deeply embedded and instilled in every action, decision, opinion, and perception of self-worth. They are not mutually exclusive, not existent on a dichotomy where to have one you inherently shirk the other.

Rather, it became very clear to me as I grew older that these frameworks could very much coexist. I found myself, as well as my mother, ruled by both simultaneously.

One day, hearing her tell me in response to a new wedding announcement: "You know it's easy to get married when you have two parents at home,"

Or making comments that she would feel safer with me going away to college if I got married first.

Another day telling me to focus on my education, my studies, my career and nothing else. That I have to take care of myself and frankly that ~men are trash~.

As you can imagine, these conflicting ideas quickly became a source of confusion for me. Should I be dependent on a man... or not?

I came to realize very quickly that this state of confusion is an inevitable state of reality when one is healing. There are constantly two mindsets at play at one time.

One brought upon by all you've ever really experienced- the pain and trauma of being stuck in a power structure that never valued your health to begin with. The other- a constantly evolving and progressive unknown ideal of health and security that is being fought for in every action and breath. In the reconciliation of these mindsets it becomes clear that what we're really experiencing is pain.

The pain of never knowing a healthy love.

The pain of not ever knowing if we will.

The pain that power causes.

And we're all just trying to heal.

That's what this story is- a woman, healing.

Healing from the wounds that the abuse and degradation of patriarchy have left.

It's a forward moving process, healing.

You're always moving towards something. What that is- is not always clear.

But it's a world where you're healthy. Where you're happy with life. Where even when you're not, you know what to do, who to go to, and how to bounce back. Where you have productive thoughts, not destructive ones. Where you think of yourself and your worth with an honest lens, untainted by negative and abusive words.

In describing this ideal I even find myself struggling with a description.
How do you describe a reality that doesn't yet exist?
A reality that seems sometimes so close, yet sometimes so unattainable.
A reality so many people actively prevent you from.
A reality that simply sounds too good to be true.
That's what healing is.

It's flailing in the darkness of an unwritten future. Trying to find
the light in your life. A light that you look for in every new face, place, and
conversation. Some light that can take you from this abyss that spans continents
and generations.

This is not just a story about a social issue.

This is a story about the human impact. The pain endured.
This is just part of my story as a woman, healing.

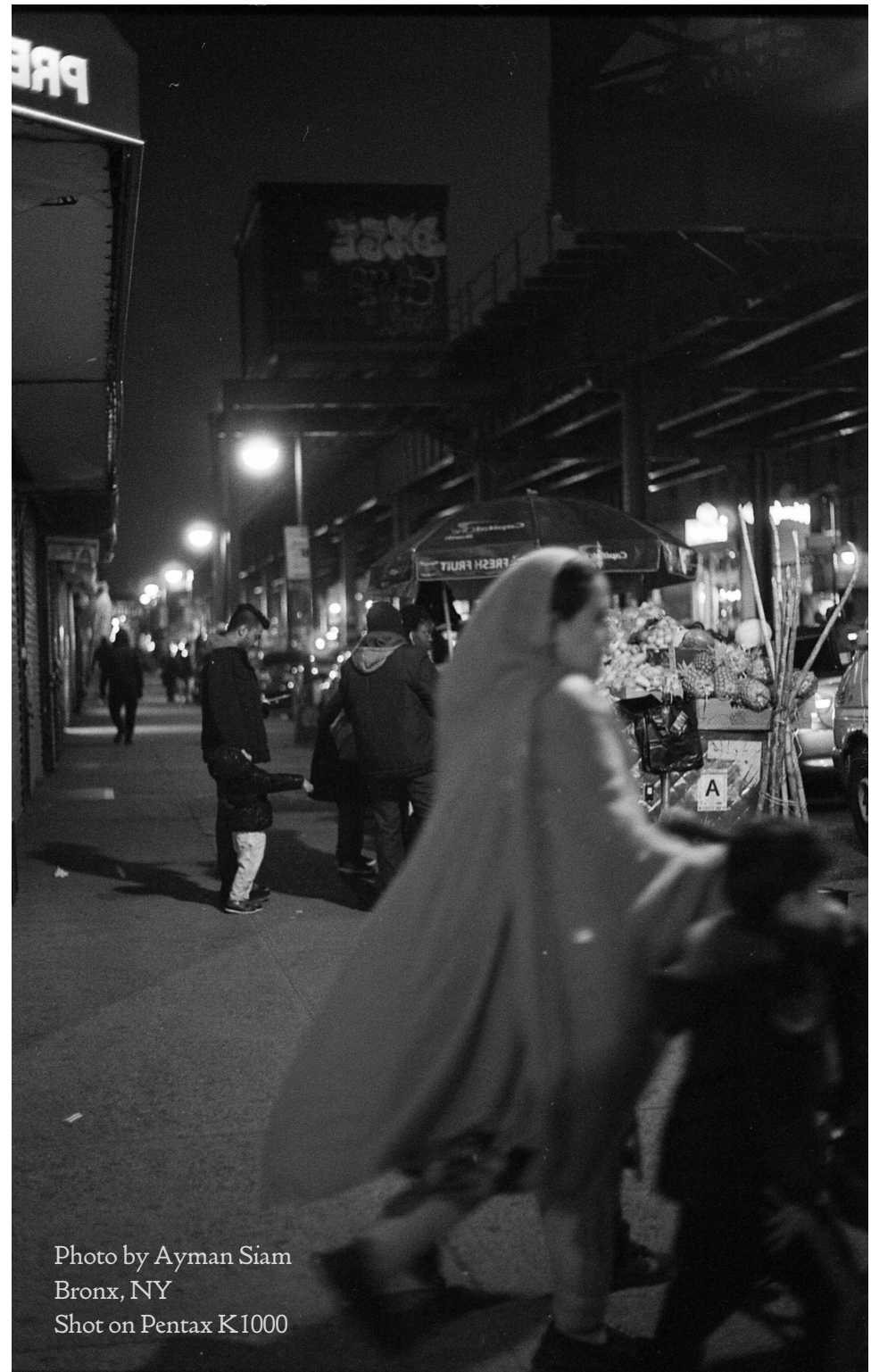


Photo by Ayman Siam
Bronx, NY
Shot on Pentax K1000



Lost

- Hawa Kebbeh

Lost in the sight of the trees
Lost in the sight of the stars
Lost in the sight of the galaxies
Lost in the sight of the sun and the moon
Can't seem to tell if it's day or night
Where do I start?
I'm just a lost soul searching for the
beauties on the earth

"Lost" by Hawa Kebbeh
Acrylic on canvas



Photo by Rabiya Shariëff
Lake Champlain, Vermont
Shot on iPhone Xs

They Ask Us Who We Are

- Rida Ali

They ask us who we are,
Because even the stars
That seem so far
From us,
Can hear the beating of our chests
As the rest
Of history
Is left
Without breath
At our story.

They ask us who we are
As we wear a sword
And march toward
A city that encompasses millions
That hold the resilience
Of a family
That cannot be forgotten.

We are the revolution
That was hidden in the whispers
Of the message that Hussain's sister
Retold,
Folded
in the gatherings that were
forbidden.
Written
in the poetry,
That thickened
The love that was

Sent down through generations.
We are the people who turned
villages into nations,
The people who were patient
Till patience tired of our patience.

They ask us who we are
While we give away our arms
and legs
& beg

To see the sight
Of the man who makes our life
What it is.

And much like the night
Greets its dawn,
we respond—
“We are the Shias of Ali.”

Your Night

- S.E. Faiz

Tonight I could try to write of the beauties of your death.
I could sit here and tell your lovers we must spread your story,
That we must keep your sacrifice alive.
I could repaint the tragic day
The painful deaths
one by one.
I could and more importantly, I should
But tonight, your night I can not
I can't get through words of melodic prose
Metaphors of pain
Similes as the distinction of love
Nor conjunctions to guide the listener to a beautiful and cathartic
release
No longer do hyperboles of your unique immaculate magnificence
roll off my tongue
Nor can I personify elements such as the uncaptured water that
bleeds to this day
Or aliterate your traits hope, hero, humble, Hussain.

For tonight is your night
And tonight
I simply can not
I can't describe
Your lonesomeness,
Your mercy,
Nor your submission.
There are not words my tongue could ever learn to speak of your
pain
Oh, Hussain.

I can not gather the words in any language

Amme parbo na
Main nahi kar sakti
Ana la mumkin
I can not

My worldly knowledge is not enough
Never could it suffice for your trials
Nor those your brother
Or Your nephews
Nor your sons

For I have been cursed with words solely from this dunya
While my love for you transcends beyond akhirah
And How could these simple words ever be enough,
for Sayed Al Shohada
How could the words of this world be enough for those lived and
died for Allah?

Please forgive me for tonight in your honor I can not string lines
of pain
Nor can I stack stanzas of prose
Or tune elegiac verses
Nor rhyme words of lament
Ya Hussain tonight I have no words to give
So I leave your lovers with the words from beyond this world,
Beyond our intellect and humanity,
Words from of the Most Loved

Inna illahi wa inna E layhi ra'joon



Photo by Hammad Shahid
Eyup Sultan Mosque, Istanbul, Turkey
Shot with Sony A7

Cliches of Death

- *Khalid Abu Dawas*

poets are unearthers
every one of my mentors tells me to stop talking about bodies
how long can you deny that we are paleontologists
most comfortable with what no one else knows about until we
unearth it for them
how long can you pretend the audiences aren't mourners
that the snaps aren't the bones

-

are you okay with standing atop a grave and stealing all the
blessing of someone else's funeral
why can't I call this selfish
why is everyone I know afraid to call another poem a funeral?
How come I can't mourn the dead every night?
Who says this is healing when we're still grieving?
why can't I call out this silence, this hypocrisy,
when everyone knows there are memories to be buried
but no one wants to pick up a shovel

A Momentary Interruption

- Yahya Khan

Pencil tip cracks, rolls over the edge of the desk, and falls to the floor without a hint of sound. The dull olive-green carpet dampens any noise it would have made anyway. Distracted; Through the corner of the window, a beam of silver moonlight enters the room and creates a spotlight on the page. Maybe the universe is trying to share some larger overarching truth about knowing your place and choosing the right path and becoming the person you were always destined to be. Night time. The faint splashing and foaming sound of soft ocean waves arriving and leaving from the shore, rhythmic but random, but the ocean is nowhere nearby. Maybe it's the gentle breeze softly grazing the leaves, or someone vacuuming next door. Like standing on a boardwalk with eyes closed. A broken pencil tip, a train stopped in the middle of its tracks because of signal problems ahead. Like the brain had been drained of all ideas within an instant and its sole purpose was to find something, anything that could bring them back. Like a stream of lighter fluid on a dwindling flame that creates a spectacular explosion upon impact. Waiting, distracted. Like ducks near the water. Calm and steady, floating with a general sense of direction, but alert and ready for an ear-piercing attack for those who dare try. Almost as startling as the sheer terror and realization of a stubbed toe, as the sensation waits a second before engrossing the entire foot in a bout of nerve-racking pain, a peek of the flames of hell. Band-aid. No use here. Just use a pen instead.



Photo by Rafi Rizwan
Herald Square, NYC
Shot on Sony A7 III

Wallets

- *The Wholesome Poet*

one mental lapse
one little mistake
and perfection forever lost

you laugh and you jeer
say "maybe tomorrow he
will finally learn"

and you may always jeer
feeling it's written fact
that i can never be capable
of accountability, care, or trust

i hope one day
you may come to see that
misplacing priceless memories
risking falsified identities
losing a few opportunities

never hurt as much as feeling
your affection was only
braided within
folded pieces of leather
and a bunch of plastic cards

Photo by Aroosha Aamir
Lower Manhattan Skyline
Shot on iPhone X






Photo by Nusaira Husain
Merced River, Yosemite
Shot on iPhone Xs

A Self Portrait

- Khalid Abu Dawas

A Self Portrait, If I Was More Than an Ethnic Interweaving.,
made of olive-eyes,
this neck a branch and your god
know what to do with a thriving tree
it's biblical should the intention
be religious, or maybe sinful if i were to enjoy it,
The Fire.,

Staff

Photo by Yahya Khan
Shot on Lumix G85

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