

Poems

Nathalie Handal

Beirut

I walk away with your eyes, half-way realize,
I didn't know their color. The way their lashes
move, the color lipstick that makes them stare.
I beg for the shape of glow to reveal itself,
for any presence, for absence we've discovered
has no wind nor song

I look at the leaves on a dry echo,
on a lazy window, by a side door,
look at the rays caught in husky voices
knowing the trembling can't divide our quiet

And we finally understand
what we've missed most about home:
the color of light
the bowls of apricots and grapes
the rose *ahweh* and light moon
the tobacco ash on our floors
the trees that let evening free
and the rhythm of prayers
we will always know,
our eyes shut,
we march
to the anthem under our tongue

Blue Hours

In the blue hour,
the *negrita* cries, I hide
not to deceive the darkness
or myself...

La *negrita* is not far
from where I stand
her eyebrows
her one hand...
I too am visible now, behind the tree
behind the night, behind the cry
and all I want to know
is her name
and ask her:
have you ever heard
your heart undressing,
seen a stray dog at midnight,
realize he understands this hour
better than we will understand any hour?
have you seen yourself in every woman
with your eyes or in women with eyes
more difficult than yours?
have you ever really heard your voice,
echoing in your nipples?

She offers me tea,
we end up drinking coffee,
trying to reach the bottom of the cup
unafraid...

Now, my teeth are stained, my English
failing me, my Arabic fading
my Spanish starting to make sense...
we are in a *finca* now—
perhaps we are safe,
perhaps we desire nothing else,
but I can't stop bowing in prayer
five times a day,
my country comes to me, tells me:
*Compatriota- I will always find you
no matter what language you are speaking.*

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