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AFTAB



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AFTAB: RAYS OF LIGHT

The Islamic Center at New York University's publication which serves as an outlet for creative writing, poetry, art, and other articles. This is a publication through which members of the New York University community can exchange ideas, share their literary and artistic talents, and communicate on the topic of Islam as well as the broad range of issues facing the Muslim community.

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Thank you to all the contributors.

Iram 'Shehzadi' Ali
I'M A RACIST

Remember that remark?
Yes, that one.
It seems like you had it saved
For this testimony:
It proves — quite factually —
That, I'm a racist.

But, hey, do you remember that?
That other thing.
I almost held my breath
Because I didn't know how to take it.
Labeling former partners by their skin-tone
And skin-tone alone.
Not adding anything else to make them seem
any more than their flesh.
– that's not quite how I flow.
But, I'm a racist.

How about that other time?
You know, that one.
About colonization —
How it holds my people back?
Yes, we're stuck in a rut
And in this inferiority complex.
Damn, I guess we need to be more
– more like you.
How many times I stood silent
And listened to this speech
Over and over.
And over again.
Yet, I'm a racist.

Right — I deviate.
Let's go back to my remark.
Yes, that one.
You would think I had enough;
Hearing you talk about things
Without having any clue.
Yes, I burst without thinking twice.
But it all makes sense:
I'm a racist.

Gareth Bryant
THIS IS WHO I AM!!!

I am.....
the white flame of a fire burning brightly, it's
never diminished.
My light will always shine for all to see, until
my life is finished.

I am.....
the cream of the crop, I go hard, I never stop.
Nothing will prevent me from reaching the top.

I am.....
every woman's fantasy, while every man's envy.
I'm the total package, the haters can't stand
me.

I am.....
a breeze, flowing through the valleys and
meadows, giving coolness to the eyes.
Always victorious, never a lame or a loser;
that's what all my enemies despise.

I am.....
like the flash of Lightning and the roar of
Thunder.
Try going toe-to-toe with me, I'll tear you
asunder.

I am.....
the courage of a Lion & the strength of a Bear.
Once I am on the scene, you'd better beware.

Since this is who I am.....
then, who are you?!!!



PHOTO BY NEEHA MUJEEB

Rhonda Khalifeh

FROM DAMASCUS WITH DIGNITY

Occasionally I catch a whiff of a stranger's jasmine scented perfume on the commuter train, or as I am weaving my way through a crowded street and I am brought back to my humble district of Damascus, Midan. I am able to recall with a fierce vividness the jasmine vines that push their way through the crumbling facades, just as I am able to recall the texture of the walls of my grandmother's building as I trace my fingers along them making my way to her door. That simple scent can send me into a whirlwind of memories. Memories, that I cling to so dearly for they serve as artifacts establishing a previous experience as a truth.

It has been only a couple of months since I returned from Damascus to my suburban home in New York, yet I already feel these artifacts slipping away; the layers of my mind becoming increasingly hard to excavate. The inability to bridge my current life to the one I have returned from has given my memories a fuzzy quality. I try and conjure up the intensity and passion that I felt while in Damascus, but no amount of al-Jazeera reports can allow me to relive the experience of watching a revolution unfold.

There is a tangible presence to oppression. It is felt in the air, a sort of thickness similar to that of a humid summer day. It is a discomfort visible on the faces of strangers on the street. A common tension, acting as a force binding the lay people together. Yet oppression was not alone in imposing its suffocating presence on the streets of Damascus. Hand-in-hand with oppression came a boiling frustration. I was asked time and time again upon my return whether I was afraid to have been in Syria during such a brutal period. The truth is, fear becomes an irrelevant emotion in the face of oppression, swept aside to allow frustration and anger to take precedence.

While oppression is far from foreign to the people of Damascus, civil disobedience and the possibility of change remained, until recently, an unchartered territory. For decades Syrians have been subjected to a ruling regime built on terror, fake smiles, and empty promises. I have visited Damascus numerous times, and each trip has been marked by a different form of political and social injustice ranging from Internet restrictions to a relative thrown into jail. Despite, the never-ending complaints and struggles discussed behind closed doors, rarely did anyone dare to speak out against the regime. The threat of the dreaded "mukhabarat" that lurk at every corner was far too great. However, on this trip I witnessed the breaking point. No longer are those with a shard of consciousness willing to stand by silently in the face of injustice.

It seems that everyone from international leaders to political analysts are obsessed with pinning down this very "breaking point"; the point that triggered the phenomena now known as the "Arab Spring." While this uprising can be attributed to devastating economic conditions, oppressive regimes, and the lack of the most basic human rights, the roots of this movement sink straight to the core of human nature. When traced to it's most basic cause I believe it is the very denial of self-dignity that pushed Arab activists, young and old, to finally join together to send the message loud and clear: "khalas – enough is enough." The need for self-dignity is more basic than most other human needs and to deny it to a people is to dehumanize them in the process. When a group of children from a small town named Deraa were captured and tortured for writing a popular Tunisian revolutionary slogan in a public space, the people of Deraa were effectively denied their self-dignity. When their requests for swift action and justice were not only

ignored, but also were mocked, they were further dehumanized. In the process of disregarding the people of Deraa, the Assad regime created an aura of despair so strong that they no longer felt they had anything to lose. Heads inflated with rage and feet restless for freedom were lured out into the unprotected streets and sparked a fire that spread rapidly with the coming weeks throughout Syria. The necessary change became the moment and the excitement of the unknown could not be quelled.

I arrived in Damascus just as the fire of the revolution was starting to spread. I spent the summer listening in on secret meetings, peaking behind draperies to watch innocent men beaten with electric rods, and laughing to the absurd propaganda dished out by the government. I listened to the sound of teargas bombs ignite over lunchtime meals and obliged when I was demanded to show personal identification at randomly placed checkpoints. I saw what they saw, heard what they heard, and felt what they felt. I agonized with their troubles, cursed the government, and worried when a family member got placed behind bars. I got into

heated debates with supporters of the Assad regime and became increasingly sad with the division they were causing within Damascus. For two months I was a full-fledged Syrian.

Yet it is only now, months after my brief dance with the Arab Spring, that I am able to reflect upon the severity of the conditions I experienced. A conception of “normal life” was birthed in my time there that made it not only possible to function, but to hold on to the hope of a changed future. I discovered the resilience of humanity and its capability to perceive despite the harshest of conditions. To date over 3,500 Syrian civilians have been murdered in this crusade for freedom and justice and hundreds more have been imprisoned and tortured. Despite this, Syrian activists continue to push for the return of their right to dignity. It is a simple right so inherent that we in the Western World tend to overlook it or take it for granted. It is high time that the democratized world reflects on their fragmented and contorted perception of justice and freedom. To stand idly and watch history unfold is a crime in itself, both to ourselves and humanity as a whole.



PHOTO BY PRIYA CHANDRA

Omar Khan

MARY

She watches the moon-rise over Jerusalem.
A fog of bleach and mold hovers heavy in the lobby.
He enters the nicotine tobacco haze,
oak floorboards whisper
harshly.
The window opens, salty air slips from the east.
The moon kisses her sea before they part.

Mary lies there, on starched sheets, paper thin,
Tracing the contours of the holed walls.
It begins.

She sings her sacred canon, purging his soul.
Her Eastern perfume infused with scent of seaweed
and sweat.

In an instant,
her pastoral ponderings overtake.

She sees her cottage shining over the western front,
in tamed supernatural ecstasy.
vast, fruitful and pure, where none intrudes,
but the occasional barren elk or ghastly deer in pederasty
she dreams mental symphonies in a
drugged lucidity,
screaming her livid harmony,
all satiable by the mad howling of Rabbinical scholars,
dying in the stables below.

Cigarette smoke shuffles quietly on the night stand.
She lies there,
burning for a false earthly connection to the starry-eyed angels.

fighting.

breathing.

finally closing her eyes,

Mary redresses.



PHOTO BY NEEHA MUJEEB

Rania Mustafa
THE PARK

Scooters fly by.
"Smart, I should have thought of that."

Skateboards swerve through cars.
"Don't I wish I could do that."

Smokers blacken the air.
"Ugh, I hate the smell of that."

Homeless people extend their hands.
"Oh you'll get used to that."

But you didn't, couldn't and don't.

The sky darkens.
No one is phased by the change of light.
The dark sounds come out
That's that. Good night.

Noor Siddiqi
UNTITLED

Rhyming is a way of life
Rhyming, writing, scribbling
Liberates
It's to clear the mind,
Turn back the hands of time
To forget the numbers circulating on your wrist
Close your eyes,
Let your thoughts unravel
Undone,
Like, untangling a tangle in a skein of yarn
Embrace the fateful risk
To sew words together, in patterns you desire.
Rhyming is not only in diction
It doesn't have to be a syntax scheme
of AAB
Rhyming is in the way you eat, breathe, walk, or sneeze.
Rhyming is a way of life,
To emancipate your mind
To create,
Create time,
Create,
Your own rhyme.



“If thou wilt be observant and vigilant, thou wilt see at every moment the response to thy action. Be observant if thou wouldst have a pure heart, for something is born to thee in consequence of every action.” ~Rumi

There is always a moment in your life when you finally decide the course of action you need to take. At that instant your mind nor your heart fluctuates, and you know that there is nothing within you strong enough to deviate you from your decision. As I saw the lifeless body of Zora, the thousands of voices, which usually kept screaming in my head all went silent. The confused being I had always been, made a 360-degree turn, and I knew I had come to a decision. I did not want to live anymore. The few minutes it took me to turn into the snake Zora had trained me to become, felt like years. However, as soon as I transformed I slithered into the house, where she had been ruthlessly slaughtered. Once there, all I had to do was to bite the man who had killed her, transferring my venom into his body. Then all I would have to do is see him wither away, crying in pain for help like Zora had, but it'd be too late for him just like it had been for her. He'd die, and my revenge would be complete. I'd watch his body desiccate with pleasure, and wait for someone to come discover his body. Since humans' biggest weakness is their impulsiveness, I knew whoever came for that worthless body would kill me right then and there- relinquishing me to my death in peace.

Alas, like most plans we make, it seemed as though God started laughing as soon as the wheels for mine were set in motion. As soon as I was about to strike the man, a force stronger than I could have ever imagined wrapped around my silky skin. I struggled against this unknown creature, my anger seething. The man, realizing his chance at freedom started backing out of the room. I hissed at this stranger, but it wouldn't release me. Instead, it patiently let it's entire body enclose around me, as a mother hugged a child. Instantly, I realized who this unknown stranger was. It was Fidata.

“You can't follow her across worlds.” Fidata's

voice vibrated in my head. The snake kept staring at me; it's mouth shut. I wasn't sure how to respond. I struggled some more, but her hold was too tight.

“Yes I can. Let Me Go!” I screamed in my head, hoping she would hear me.

“Her time came, and she's gone. You need to let go of her.” Her voice calmly but sternly vibrated in my head. A warning she would not let go until I cooperated with her.

I stopped struggling, my mind turned numb, and my body limp.

2 Years Later

I used to think those who said you could not help control who you fell in love with were weak. If you couldn't control anything else in life, you could control emotions. However, the world is filled with irony, and I am now a part of that foolish fraternity. My life was far from simple before I had met her, but I wasn't attached to it. Actually, I hadn't been attached to much back then. Zora was gone forever, and no words, especially those regarding religion or the hereafter consoled me. She took a part of me when she left, and no one could ever bring that piece back.

My day-to-day goal was simple, to find a way out of life, out of myself without taking my own life. Suicide, as well as being illegal was pointless in the religion I grew up in. For once you killed yourself, it wasn't a release, as one would expect it to be. No, God had a different sort of imprisonment for someone trying to escape His plan; you'd be forced to die the same death for all eternity. It seemed like a futile reason to not end my misery, since at that point in time I had stopped believing as well. How could there be a God that existed when there seemed to be no justice in the world? Death lurked within every shadow, nothing saving you from it, no matter who you were. It was easier not to expect anything from a “higher being”, at least there was no disappointment when you lost the things you cared about the most in life.

The Greeks had portrayed their Gods as being human, selfish, each god having a bigger ego than the next, and that ego leading to their demise. I had started to think; maybe their view was correct. How could God, whose name was Ar-Rahim (The Merciful), exist when I could see no mercy left in the world? How could humans be His greatest creation when their hearts were harder than the clay, which they were created by? Even us jins, created by the harshest element on earth-fire, were more gracious and careful than those humans could ever be. How could I have believed in a higher being? To think there was no one out there, was better than to believe that the only being that was didn't care about you. However, even then, who'd want to take a chance to die the same death for all eternity?

So I lived, but just barely. I had put a facade on, becoming a brilliant actor to stay alive for those around me. No one had seen the true me for years then, and no one was ever going to. I kept up this act solely for the woman who had sacrificed her life to raise Zora and me, even though our own biological parents had abandoned us. Since, I was the only one left in her life, I had to make it seem that nothing was ever wrong with me, nothing in our life had changed, even though it felt the entire world had collapsed and there was no reason for existence. She never told us her real name, but we all called her Fidata, a name derived from Latin, meaning someone with infinite wisdom, who you can trust. Our name for her suited her perfectly, but was more the reason that my false sense of strength never eluded her. As time passed, I could no longer stand to see her pity me. The sadness which crept into her eyes whenever she saw me sitting by myself, my guard down, sent sharp pains through my core. It was better to slowly detach myself, to become someone she did not want to be around. As lonely as I had become, I needed her to hate me so it would not hurt her when I too was gone.

At first I had not known how to slowly slip away from her. We lived in a part of the town that was small, and our tribe was the only one that inhabited this desert like, yet clean area. Most tribes of our kind usually lived in dirtier

regions, but Fidata was religious, and she said God liked cleanliness. However, just like I had been hoping for, a new tribe came into town. They called themselves Raf. At their arrival, a secret meeting was held, after the Fajjr (dawn) prayer. The chief of our tribe warned all of us to stay away from them. Declaring to us that they were related to those of the Rafidah, which in the prophetic narration was the worst of the lot of jins. This made my curiosity and desire to meet them grow stronger. I knew that due to her piety, Fidata would never entertain the thought of me becoming friends with the new clan. I had hoped she would eventually break her bonds with me, and that's exactly what started to happen.

After the council meeting, I went searching for the band of jinns. I found them living on the outskirts of the town, where the human pubs and brothels were located. As I entered, I became apprehensive about my plan. Thinking that maybe I had underestimated the dire maledvolence of the clan the chief kept warning us about. This new clan's choice of their place of residence displayed their state of corruptness and audacity. For not even the most adventurous jinn from my tribe would fathom even stepping foot into this part of town. This area was known for encompassing the scum of the humans, who were known to become violent and aggressive as soon as they were intoxicated, killing any species that came near them, without remorse. However, when I met them my anxiety was appeased. They seemed like a normal bunch, just extremely careless with their actions. These jinns didn't live according to the rules that had been hammered into my head since childhood. They believed in revenge, and retaliation against those who oppressed others; especially humans. Further more, these jinns were so much more perceptive than any I had ever met. Without me having to explain myself, they knew I hadn't felt like I belonged. Thus, instead of ostracizing me, nor badgering me about my past, the elders introduced me to a group of four jinns my age, and told the leader of the group, Seyan to keep an eye out for me.

I followed them around night and day, com-

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pleting all the tasks they required of a new member, as I learned the ins and out of their way of life. Seyan was the only one who was allowed to ask me about my past life. After finding out about Zora, he trained me how to retaliate against those who were responsible for the death of my sister, without losing my life in the process. Thus, I spent my days haunting humans. It was invigorating at first, having the ability to see someone, but them not see you. My favorite was playing mind games on them. However, a part of me felt remorse after torturing them. Seyan appeased my guilt, stating that the constituency of this district was the nastiest of the human race. So they deserved whatever way we treated them. This helped, since technically we weren't actually harming them. In fact, we were not allowed to get in their way, so we would only try to make our presence known to them. Most of them, too self-involved to think anything could exist besides themselves, just thought they were going crazy when we'd move things around. Others would suspect something was amiss, but like some jins, some humans also lie to their hearts, and deny what they know is true. Thus, they would act like nothing was wrong in front of their friends, but quickly move away, never returning. I met many such characters, my hate for humans increasing every time I met these fools.

Following Seyan's lead, I quickly won the trust of everyone in the group. I finally started to lose the recollection of my old life that pained me so much. Finding this new clan was like I had found a miracle drug that numbed all my feelings. Spending time with them released me from my thoughts; it took away every bit of negative sensation my mind had endured in the past two years. I began to believe I had been finally released from feeling any emotion ever again, and then that all changed the night of the eclipse. The night when I saw her.

Saba Ashraf
LIFE

The lasso stringing tight against the neck
The syndicate rests aback
Ah, jotters taking notes
Silhouette of man
Weak-kneed day after day
Dragging pumps towards the grave
An amorphous god?
Affirmative
Discerning worthy and unworthy?
Aye again
Eating time sadistically?
Nay, nay, nay
For
He is Time
In His Holy Book of Words
In His Cosmos
In His Man
In Himself
Henceforth
Form given- soul granted to clay
Thus
Earthed from the beginning
Life to each labourer:
Tiny footsteps
Infinitesimal in their grandeur
(What walk on the moon?)
Walking on His Designs
Engraved into the sweaty foreheads
Each passing's line
God around each Bend
God in the Hind
Man exists?
The lasso stringing....
The lasso stringing tight against the neck
The syndicate rests aback
His Mastery- The Design:
One night time janitor
One rich man's chaffeur
One maid scurrying past the mistress of the house
Hiding from the glance,
Living the shame
(Lament O' MAN! The Shame! The Blame!)
the guilt, one askance look
One loaf awaiting her son's grunt for food
The abase
The humbled
The bellies by the roadside
See them?
They differ not

From pebbles on the riverbanks
Man Watches?
He Watches?
An All-Seeing God?
Affirmative
Discerning worthy and unworthy?
Affirmative
Disremembers the downtrodden in all seasons
and corners,eh collectively?
Nay, nay, nay
For
He Sustains
In His Flora His Fauna
His Creation
In His Man
In Himself
Henceforth:
Hark!
Witness the green belt by the roadside?
Hope.
Hear the sound?
ONE call, ONE LONG hoot of the wolf
ONE cry in the wilderness
The echo
Ah over ages of hunger
The pull from the bottomless abyss
A strike of His Hand
Count not the minutes, the hours, the years,
the ages
for Man- Man cannot count
For
He is Time
In His Holy Book of Words
In His Cosmos
In His Creation
In His Man
In Himself
Man doth not exist
HE ALL AROUND



PHOTO BY PRIYA CHANDRA

Nadia Q. Ahmad

I HAD ONLY RECENTLY HEARD ABOUT THE RAINFALL

the rain drops fall, and tears well up
to meet them.
in quiet astonishment
a small laugh,
short, yet bright,
erupts from my lips. it is
a sudden stillness, like thunder,
or church bells in a small town.
how could I not have ever noticed
that tears come up
to meet their heaven-brethren.
how could I not have noticed?

supplication

quench our thirst,
wet our tongues,
our hearts, our souls,
our fingertips.
grant us the strength, the breaths
with which to inhale the light mists
and deep waves
of our joys,
and our pains
and then to release them back to you,
jagged, naked, stripped of our pride.
help us face each day's decisions
with clear heads, and full hearts.
help us all
live good lives,
by means that we can pursue.

we pray for our parents –
that you have mercy on them
as they cherished us in our childhoods.
we pray for their parents before them,
and their parents before them,
may their souls be cleansed,
and at rest.
we pray for our children,
and their children after them,
and their children after them,
that they carry themselves
with gestures firm, yet more modest
than those our own memories have claimed.

yaa rabb,
grant us the insight
and courage
to reflect,
nurture our passions,
and hold ourselves
on what we believe to be worthy
and beautiful.
enable our faith
to ennoble and fulfill;
not to put us
in competition
with one another.
grant us
the sense
to assess
our own deeds, and speech, and thoughts
before we become intent
on bending intentions
that we could not
ever see.

we ask for forgiveness
and we ask for
a fraction, even
– a sip –
of your power to forgive.

yaa rabb,
we pray that you hear us,
hear me,
hear our tears
pitter patter
on the roof of the sky.

Omar Khan
TO THE WHORE OF KEIGHLEY

Part I: the whore

Misogynistic tendencies. Masochist leanings. Pornographic spiritualities.

Minerva the amorous, the everlasting, the naïve.

Green-eyed harlot and deity of deceit.

Whose fury--jovian bolts-- is stronger than the stench of Até
come hot from hell, holy harlem or western shire.

My dear virgin-whore of Sabine--

lest you lend me your fears, soiled furs, thorns
and conjured tears.

In this ballad

--the moaning of your Sirenic hymn--
our ashes lie buried.

My Desire now wither'd- revealing commonality--lucid

our ghastly pure, our indecisive,

our true fraternal and universal--

stagnant in singular rotting -divine blasphemyhere

lies our sacred, our sins, our seraphim- be they all

remember'd, conceived in vices,

birthed in our vanity.





PHOTO BY OMAR KHAN

Part II: the dream

Feel her, moving with me.

Her chest in unison with mine.

I enter darkness.

Her hair, raven and light, vivid as her eyes; divine.

Olive skin- caked in powdery glow.

we fall.

Honeyed green eyes, doe-like,
reflecting pools of Immaculate Rapture--
only mildly histrionic.

The tips of each of my fingers take their turn,
gently tracing the contours of her leg's soft down.

Breathing in motion,
breathing as singular strangers- consummated
breathing as those restless comrades- untimely reunited
in a cheap country motel.

Spirit fading in the depths, with flickerings of coyness.

Her lips, light, thin, pursed

Her smile:

dead and blatantly artificial,
seductive.

Inviting.

Ah, her smile! How her mouth twists,
tugging at the corners, revealing her inner ungodliness.

I resurface.

With a kiss and a postcard from the seventh level of paradise,
numbing my fears in a Parisien dive.

Lanes of intersecting dreams and futures fade
as the last grain trickles down the glass.

We have lingered in the trenches of the sea,
long enough,

by our warring Sirens dressed in seaweed--
rotting, gold and brown.

Till human voices wake us,
and I drown.

Iram "Shehzadi" Ali

BECAUSE TOMORROW IS ANOTHER DAY

"Who are you?!" she yells, peering down to the man sleeping next to her. As she takes in the strange surroundings, her heart begins to beat faster.

"Jane, please calm down," the man says as he rolls over and holds her hand, still not quite awake. Jane quickly pushes his hand away and gets off from the bed.

"Don't touch me!" she yells as she searches for her shoes. A million thoughts crossing her mind as to how she awoke in a stranger's home.

"Jane, please," the man says as he looks at her scrambling around the room. He finally relents, "Your shoes are under the bed." Jane quickly reaches for them and puts them on. Before thinking twice, she hurries out of the room and out of the house.

Shaking from what just took place, she runs to relieve her nerves—and so the man doesn't follow her.

The morning has a cool breeze to it, but her linen PJ's are way too thin to protect her from the weather's piercing stings. After running for a mile, she finally rests near a lamp post at an intersection: Broadway and Lincoln Avenue. Home. Although out of breath, she automatically feels secure.

She slowly walks to the high-rise building. An elderly guard opens the doors for her.

"Miss Jane, top o' the morning to yuh," he says, taking his blue cap into his hands.

"Mornin', Albert," she says, "I don't think I have my keys."

"Oh, that's no biggie, Miss. You always leave a spare with me."

"I do?"

"Why, yessum," he says, taking out a pair of keys from his pocket. The keychain has a yellow duck hanging from a thin chain.

"Right. I must have forgotten. Sorry about that," she says, retrieving the keys from his delicate hands, "Thanks!"

"Anytime, Miss."

*

After taking the longest shower of her life, Jane exits her bedroom in a fresh pair of clothes. She reenters the bathroom with an empty garbage bag in hand. Slowly, she lifts each piece of the garments from the night before and throws them in. Tying the bag as tightly as possible, she heads out of her apartment and straight to her friend's forensic lab.

"Clare!" Jane calls out as she busts into Clare's lab.

"Jane, are you okay?" Clare asks as she spins around in her office chair.

Jane explains how she woke up in a strange home with absolutely no recollection of what happened the night before.

“Sounds like someone had too many drinks,” laughs Clare.

“Can you be serious for two seconds? Besides, you know I haven’t been to a bar in....in...”

“In five years, I know. So what do you think happened.”

“I don’t know. I just want you to run some tests on my clothes.”

“Jane, you don’t think it was date rape do you? Because I can’t remember the last time you were on a date, either,” Clare tries to hold back her laughter, but her mood changes when she sees Jane lean back in the chair and cross her arms. “Okay, so I’ll see what I find on your clothes and let you know.”

“Thanks. You know I really appreciate this.”

After speaking for a few more minutes, Jane leaves to head to the park. As soon as she is out of the door, Clare picks up her phone and dials an all-too-familiar number.

“Hello,” says a deep voice on the other end.

“Frank, what were you thinking keeping her all night?” Clare yells into her phone.

“Please calm down. She left in the morning and didn’t remember a single thing from las—”

“Except she thinks you raped her. God, Frank, when will you learn to let go?”

“What would you have me do? Drug her and bring her back to her apartment? Or even better, put her on the curb instead?”

“You know that’s not what I mean. Maybe you should be more careful, that’s all,” Clare sighs and hangs up the phone.

*

Jane sits down on the warm wooden bench that overlooks a playground. Her favorite spot to open up a book. Just as her eyes begin to scan the words, a ball drops by her feet. She picks it up with her left hand and looks up to see a young girl running towards her. Jane sticks out her hand to give the girl her ball back.

“Thank you!” the little girl yells, panting.

“You’re welcome,” Jane answers, smiling back at her.

The little girl turns around to go back, but hesitates for a few moments. She turns back around and faces Jane once more.

“My name is Elizabeth,” she says, taking a seat next to Jane.

“That is a beautiful name! If I have a daughter, that’s what I would name her. How old are you, Elizabeth?” Jane asks as she turns her full attention to Elizabeth.

“I’m almost six. In....in.....” she counts on her fingers and then thinks for a while, then counts again, “in three months.”

“That’s lovely! You’re almost a young lady!”

“Yeah, that’s what daddy always says.”

“Where is your daddy?” Jane says looking around at the parents standing on the edge of the playground.

“Oh, he’s in the car. He said it was too hot for him to come out.”

“Doesn’t he play with you?” Jane asks, questioning the father’s parenting skills.

“Sometimes, when mommy isn’t around.”

“And where is your mommy?”

“She’s.....I think daddy said to say she’s busy. Well, I have to go now.”

Elizabeth gets up and runs away before Jane has a chance to respond. Elizabeth plays for a few more minutes, then heads towards a blue car. Jane relaxes as she gets safely inside of the car.

*

Without realizing how much time had passed while she was reading, Jane looks up and sees the sun slowly making his way towards the horizon. She quickly puts her book away and begins to walk home. Her home on Beverly Avenue and Kingston Road.

She reaches the door to the large house. After a few minutes of searching her bag, she realizes that she doesn’t have her own keys. Instead, she finds a pair of keys on a yellow duck keychain. she puts it back into her bag.

Remembering that there is always a spare key on top of the door’s panel, she reaches over until she feels a metal object. She takes it down and unlocks the door.

“Elizabeth!” she yells in excitement. “I missed you all day.”

Elizabeth runs towards her and hugs Jane.

“I’ve missed you too, mommy.”

As soon as their embrace is over, Jane’s husband steps into the doorway between the corridor and the kitchen.

“Frank, why are you looking at me like that?” Jane asks as she goes over and gives him a kiss on the cheek.

“I’ve missed you.”

“Don’t be silly! It’s only been a few hours. Work ran late today,” Jane says, taking out the strange keys from her bag. “I don’t know who’s these are.”

“I’ll take them,” says Frank as he retrieves them from her hand and places them securely in his pocket.

“Will you stop staring at me?” Jane laughs, feeling flattered that her husband has taken such a deep interest in her.

“I wish you would know me all the time,” Frank says as he embraces her and Elizabeth, too afraid to face tomorrow all over again.

DRAWING BY RUANN IBRAHIM





ISLAMIC CENTER AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

PHOTO BY OMAR KHAN