

POETRY February .5

# Terrorists Speak in Strange Languages

*I lock my tongue / even though I've prayed / in Persian for a thousand years.*

By S. Asef Hossaini, translated from the Persian Dari by Farzana Marie

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Time burst and we emerged  
to begin our lives,  
we tied our shoes and ran away.  
The street was full of worried eyes,  
we  
were full of the street—  
our hands have been cobblestoned  
and our heart valves opened  
like cheap cabarets.

I don't know why or where or how  
I put your temptation away inside a book  
I don't know why or where or how  
my eye slipped on the buttons of your dress  
I don't know why or where or why  
my eyelid pulsed—

Now you're gone  
and life in my brain's gray cells  
is a replay of our days together.  
The Sahara is expanding in my chest  
and yet seven seas beyond that  
acid rain intoxicates the dead  
of Dasht-e Leili.[\[1\]](#)

Do you remember, darling?  
We were suffering

while the government in the Arg[2]  
flourished  
we were suffering  
and a woman in Badakhshan was dying  
we were reciting poems  
and a man was butchered  
in the south.

Do you remember?  
I was in Mullah Omar's heartland  
reciting love poems  
I said: the prayer beads mature in the tavern  
and love matures in fear.

Everything is fine here.  
“No clouds, no wind, I sit next to the pool.”  
Just a song is enough to complete  
the Attan dance  
and the looting of my father's land  
even outdoes the Mongols.

Everything is fine:  
the disaffected brother  
smokes shisha and cuts off ears in the evenings,  
cuts off the nose so his wife  
will not smell the opium  
and people's steeped brains.  
He cuts off ears so that  
we will be domesticated,  
he is so religious  
that he impregnates eleven houris every night  
and in the morning, goes to the Arg  
to sharpen his artificial teeth.

But I still worry  
about your dress  
because my eyelid pulses constantly.

My darling,  
the weather is cold  
and many babies are being aborted  
and we,  
standing in a line  
of one hundred and twenty thousand prophets  
are still thirsty, still hungry...but we voted.  
We cannot change the world,  
sing songs, and be happy;  
just let me squeeze the map  
into the space of a cage  
so that our lands will mate.

The police say: terrorists  
speak in strange languages.  
I lock my tongue  
even though I've prayed  
in Persian for a thousand years.  
In solitary confinement  
I continually confess  
and at night  
when I stretch out my bones in the corner  
I pray your name  
seventy two times and no more.

You sit in far-off longing  
and all of my roads to your arms  
are blocked today  
—They say an explosion happened out your way—  
Do you remember  
Venice, where the Mediterranean came up  
and pulled your ankle to the ocean?  
I said: this is enough for the sea fairies  
to find their lost way.  
You laughed, what a pity  
how quickly we have been lost.

My longing is so deep

that three hundred and sixty five miners  
have died in it.

*Berlin, 26 November, 2010*

## NOTES

1. Dasht-e Leili refers to a desert located in Jawzjan province in the north of Afghanistan. The place is famous for the massacre of Taliban fighters there in 2001, but prior to that, in the summer of 1998, when the Taliban captured Mazar-e Sharif, its fighters brought hundreds of men to the desert and killed them.
2. The Arg refers to the Afghanistan presidential palace.



Feature image by [Mohammed Muhridin](#).