

Poetry Series

Hibah Shabkhez
- poems -

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Hibah Shabkhez()

Hibah SHABKHEZ is a writer of the half-yo literary tradition, an erratic language-learning enthusiast, a teacher of French as a foreign language and a happily eccentric blogger. Studying languages and literature from a comparative perspective across linguistic and cultural boundaries holds a particular fascination for her.

Black Roses

(First published in The Ravi 2015)

I flee the jaws of Time's story
As they snip me apart twig by twig
Black Roses nesting
In the flesh that was broken
Sand sweeps in, questing
Eternity's whittling me down to a sprig
An Enting lost in a paper factory

Hibah Shabkhez

Heal Me Slowly

Heal me slowly, O death, heal me slowly
Leave me the day's dying light
Come for me gently in the night
Heal me slowly, O death, heal me slowly
Leave me a little while my pain
Let me watch a sun set again
Heal me slowly, O death, heal me slowly
The scent of new-born summer lingers
Mingles with winter's cold fish fingers
Heal me slowly, O death, heal me slowly
Let me taste one more mango
Leave me to dance another tango
Heal me slowly, O death, heal me slowly
Come for me gently in the night
Leave me the day's dying light
Heal me slowly, O death, heal me slowly

Hibah Shabkhez

Here

Here we lay etched upon the grass
The sun rained down in broken rays
Seared to smudges, fried-onion brass
The colour that will haunt our days

Here we stood carved into a tree
Wobbly letters at the ends of a spear
Driven through a heart doomed to be
The lodestone of every shattered tear

Here we sailed forth in a cockel-shell
Round the world, round and back again
Here the ocean sounded its old knell
Whirled us back into the old pain

Hibah Shabkhez

The Delirium Of Dedalus

Dark spinning avius, fly into the sun
Icarus, Icarus, hold! Here we come
Upon the soaring black wings of life
To snatch my son from the Wave
To snatch my son from the grave
From dancing to the eternal fife,
Icarus, Icarus, hold! Here we come
Dark spinning avius, fly into the sun

Hibah Shabkhez

The Gift Of A Friend

Dear Lord, Dear Lord,
Dear Lord, Dear Lord,
Give me a gift,
Give me the gift,
The gift of a friend

Dear Lord, as Thou knowest full well
My soul is full of tears I cannot ease
Dear Lord, Thou that knowest the wail of Hell
Grant it awhile Thy blessed peace!

Dear Lord, put Thou an end to this miserable tale!
Have I a 'self', a being I may yet mar or make?
Spurred by the frost of a steel-spun heart I rail
Light Thou a tenderer path I still may take!

Dear Lord, tend thine aid in 'scaping this cage!
Break my fetters, cast away of indifference the bar
By giving me just the sorrow and the rage
Of a blighted land ravaged by war!

Dear Lord, I ask not of Thee the loan
Of delirious transports, passion, joy!
I ask naught but a friend of my own
A living heart to learn mine glazed heart by!

Dear Lord, Dear Lord,
Give me this gift,
This gift of tenderness, of amity;
An it please Thee, send it to me
And I shall evermore be dumb - upon my fealty!

Reveal, prithee, a glimmer of the dove
To this mine heart of steel;
Cast this iron into the fire of love
Bring back childhood's warmth and zeal!

I tell Thee all that time has sown
I plead my cruel, barren lot,

A starveling life which has never known
Natural warmth even of the basest sort

Even if it is just to lose it
Even if it is but the bond of ship and scend
Even if I cannot keep so beautiful a rosette
Just once give me a real friend!

Dear Lord, I hope as I could erstwhile never
At the waning grey dusk of my piteous life
I dream again of finding happiness, of fervour
Is it naught but folly, worthy of Death's knife?

For this one last rhyme Thy shield send
Grant me the will to act in another wise
Dear Lord, even to deserts thou dost lend
The rain that makes them blossom ere sunrise.

Hibah Shabkhez

The Lament Of The Maiden-Daughter

O my father, why do they bear thee hence?
O father, from this thy hearth and thy haven?

Thou, so tall, so proud, so brave, so strong!
Thou to lie still, silent, stiff upon a pallet!
Thou thunderless, as they bore thee along
Thou, with thy voice blood-kin to a mallet!

Thou to hear unmoved our moaning wail
Thou, to heed not my mother's broken cry!
Thou, O my father, sooner than us fail
Thou wouldst have cloven earth and sky!

O my father, why do they bear thee hence?
O father, from this thy hearth and thy haven?

They bear thee hence, cruel cold callous men
They are deaf to our entreaties and tears;
They - art of their heartless number, then
They who'll not spare a word for our fears?

They'll not bury thee 'neath that rude soil?
They know thy hatred for a speck on thy coat
They know how thou wouldst with fury recoil
They know - and the wretches, they gloat!

O my father, why do they bear thee hence?
O father, from this thy hearth and thy haven?

O father! The very walls of thy house
O father! Cannot abide to bid farewell
O father! Will their quiet grief not rouse
O father! The soul that lived in this shell?

O father! The cherry-goblet, spilling over
O father! The orange and a half upon the wall
O father! The Lord's house framed in clover
O father! "Return!" they cry; hear them call!

O my father, why do they bear thee hence?
O father, from this thy hearth and thy haven?

Surrounded, strangled, stifled by strangers
Surrounded by life's scorching suns I stand
Surrounded, O my father, by a host of dangers
Surrounded - thy daughter, and thou not at hand!

Surrounded, slashed by frost, by wind and hail
Surrounded with death, like autumn-stripped bark
Surrounded by axes, by a shendful flood of mail
Surrounded, bare, like Noah without his ark!

O my father, why do they bear thee hence?
O father, from this thy hearth and thy haven?

Still through the mists clouding my eye
Still through the bleeding wreck of my heart
Still for thy sake I hold my head high
Still thou wouldst have me play this part!

Still thy daughter, smiling and stiff-spined
Still calm, dutiful as thou badst me be
Still thy daughter, with thy edicts entwined
Still about my heart in adversity!

O my father, why do they bear thee hence?
O father, from this thy hearth and thy haven?

Hibah Shabkhez

The Land Of The Lost

Come we will an the road is open,
Come we will an the door swings ajar,
The land we glimpsed longing from fens afar,
Shall now be ours to make or mar!

Unto the gate we shall be holpen,
There with ye forever spar.
Perish not, then; cry instead, 'War! War! War! '
After, the doom lies no more in fist or star!

The land of clouds where suns rain down,
The land of roses where tulips are;
Land of the living where the dead croon,
Land of misery where joys scar!

Lady of our heart, bane of our soul!
Cradle of our carcasses, stinking hole!
Land of lightening, land of love!
Haunt of the eagle, refuge of the dove!

We come, O Land of the Lost!
We come in a trice, gauze bannered host,
War we shall, against thy woes,
With axe and hoe and thy own foes!

Hibah Shabkhez

The Lassie And The Brook

"Look upon me, waters wild
And tell me what you see
Gaze upon me, sweet and mild
And sing to me of me."

"Coarse of bone and gross of jaw
Goggle-eyed and greed-curst;
A voice like the raven-crow's caw
A wretched gown about to burst

I look upon thee joylessly
And tell thee what I see
I gaze upon thee, sour and sely
And sing to thee of thee"

"Alack, blind old Father Brook
With their pitchers that the maidens took
Hath wandered thine native wit!
For naught is more justly deemed unfit

Than churlish speech 'fore beauty bright
Where with the dual sense of duty and right
All must turn to look and praise
And none but smitten gazes raise!

Nymph-daughter of Woman am I
The years untouched pass me by
I am the lady of love and grace and light
Vanquisher of the armoured might

That would dreadless have given pause
To the furious fangs and dagger claws
Of a raging dragon! Think ye then
To rate and slander such a paragon? "

"Bless my soul! Here's a passion!
Naught but a youngling's headstrong vanity
May carry on in such a fashion!
For once, nobility, clergy, laity

Must needs unite in their revulsion
Of machinations in such very bad taste
This excessively peculiarly unseemly haste
This turbine-style propulsion!

Nay, child, stay! For I mock thee not
I'll avow thy form is lovely
But who shall account thy beauty aught
When the soul within is ugly? "

"Prattle not to me of the soul
'Tis the cant of each ill-favoured foal
Who slanders the splendour he cannot have
And seeks with sermons his envy to lave! "

With sorrow and yearning fear I saw
Eva's foolish daughter saunter away
And felt doubtful gain-giving gnaw
At my meandering on its placid way

Years flowed on and I
Watching the man-world trundle by
Never once forgetting the bonnie young lass
Waited with heavy heart for her to pass

Spring comes, trailing summer, autumn, chill winter
Which glazes me over 'till I once again splinter
To Spring's sweet persuasions and noble Sun's power
Content am I, come hail or gentle shower!

In the man-world though, life moves apace
Every single time that the sun leaves its cradle
Has in their fretting lives an appointed place;
With want and fear they ever themselves saddle

And then, slow, weary and drifting
Listless wrinkles where there was wont to be flitting
A haughty relentless thirst for adulation,
She came, hanging her head in mortification

"Alas! " Lamented I."Alas! Foolish child

Who didst treat sage counsel as folly wild
Alas, the ruin I foresuffered hath fallen upon thee
Alack, that Thou hadst but heeded me! "

"Heeded thee? So indeed I did!
Conscience strove to mould me as Thou didst bid
Thenceforth, unto this dolorous dawn
I had no more pride than a beech-wood fawn

For, despite my vaunting words
Thy shafts quivered in my flesh;
And despite ambition's fluttering birds
I resolved to commence afresh.

The citadel of vice thence to virtue fell
And thus my woe and ruin began;
For mocked and spurned by every man,
I heard each cold unanswered door-bell

Toll out anew my own death-knell
Scorned and scourged, here I will dwell
To curse evermore thy truth-barbed tongue
That myself 'gainst the cliffs of Fortune flung! "

Troubled, I searched in vain
For a balm to lay upon her searing pain
I spoke of seeking beauty at the core
Behind the visage now a noxious sore

I spoke of God and His Nature
I hinted of a design mysterious and divine
But I could not stay this miserable creature
From heaping insults upon me and mine

Ever and ever does she cry
Upon virtue and its adherents fie
And within myself I cannot but ponder:
What if I had held my peace yonder?

Would she now in a castle lie
And go to a last rest sweet and brave?
Or would she still rave tempestuously by

My banks as she slid into an unmarked grave?

Hibah Shabkhez

We Ride North, Awaken!

Set aside dull labour, set aside cold pleasure
We ride for the mountains, for the evergreen treasure
Ah! The call of the Lord of the Snows has come
We ride North, awaken! We ride North!

Set aside raiment of silk, set aside flag of white
We ride for the mountains, for every man's birthright
Ah! The call of the Lord of the Winds has come
We ride North, awaken! We ride North!

Set aside frail keening, set aside menial care
We ride for the mountains, for revenge on an old despair
Ah! The call of the Lord of the Snows has come
We ride North, awaken! We ride North!

Rosamundi, Rosamundi, Rose of all the World
We ride for the mountains, for the planting of the flag unfurled
Ah! The call of the Lord of the Thorns has come
We ride North, awaken! We ride North!

Hibah Shabkhez

Yes-Person

All the long merry days of thy life, child

Shalt evermore do as thou art bid;

Lay aside now these fancies wild,

Else shalt cringe when thou art chid!

For the yoke upon thy fluttering heart,

Comes not from the censure of the world;

Were this cool defiance thy natural part,

Wouldst tremble so as it unfurled?

Free, free as yon great bird am I

To soar towards that blue, blue sky

Do eaglets not come to their wings atrembling?

My heart too has courage; behold it assembling!

I am the purple thread `pon the world's white robe

An the pale-dyeing traitor lives within me,

Does it not then more earnestly behove

Me to cast it forth and my true self be?

Thy true self? Faugh! Blasphemy! Arrant knavery!

Wast born to crawl humbly upon the earth

Clip thy false wings! Return! Now be

As beseems one who knows her meagre worth.

Child, all I now in seeming cruelty say

I say for the good of thee and thine;

Wouldst from the creed of all our kind stray,

Lay `pon us the pall of ruin, shame me and mine?

No! Mother, no! Rather my right hand would I give

To spare thee a moment's pain while I yet live!

Yet whither shall the tempest within me turn?

An I yield not, ye hurt; an I yield, I burn!

The salt and the scum of the earth am I

Oh Mother! Hast other daughters, a dozen sons

Set me free to soar wild and high

My fate was not written in thy buttered buns!

Hold! Set thee free! Never! Oh, God forbend!

Set thee free to err in thy wilful way!

Stay! With all my power do I thee defend

To transgress my law for a single day!

Go then! Follow thy brazen will an ye list

I cast thee forth from my heart and my home -

Else return my darling daughter; but then, desist!

Forbid thy vagrant fancy evermore to roam!

Thou hast reason, Mother, the fault is mine

If I cannot be as other maidens are;

I doubt not, Mother, the true course is thine -

Let thy gentle love not suffer me to wander far!

All thy days of my life I yoke to thy law,

Yes-person of a long race of yes-persons am I,

I will obey thee evermore with trembling awe!

Yes, I will. Yes, I will. Yes, I will. Yes, I will. Yes, I -

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