

After My Own Death

S. Asef Hossaini

It was afternoon when you held me tight in your arms
so I could have faith in you. My father
whispered in my ears a recital
of *adhan*. I laughed,
my father said, “happy life ahead.”
I laughed, my mother’s fingers played
with my lips, and I
smiled.

*

It was raining and the sky
was clear. You were drunk
and uninhibited. To the point that I could
pluck drunken tears from your cheeks.
You were an illuminated
town in these rabid
dog eyes.

*

Red roses decay after ten thousand
minutes but I
am alive. I didn’t perish
in a plane crash, nor was I killed
as the Taliban attacked, I wasn’t
drowned in a river and no gunfire
holed my chest.

*

And now, afternoons, I’m confident
and comfortable

on this rocking chair that I sit
with the black tea that I sip

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I think of the nightfall
it may bring the jasmine
fragrance, bitter and greedy
like a drunken man
who gazes into an abyss, an empty
bottle of vodka,
I think
of the nightfall.

*

One of these days, they'll find my fossils
in a coal mine. That same coal
warms your hands. Do you see
my eyes are similarly
ember and ever glowing?
I've been discovered
and it's a great pride for the miners
but for me, I only think of the moments
that you gaze at me through translucent
frames. "Look, the Louvre is so glorious."

*

Possibly ten thousand days have passed.
I'm happy about the rain clouds
traveling through the Mediterranean.
I've tied a clump of my clothes.
 I've even washed my socks.
 I dropped off letters
 at the post office. I let go
 of my shoes, walking by the stream.
 I threw seeds out the window.
Is there anything else to live for?

*

My woman, I rest in a mosque
where no wave's arch
tall or short
reaches its vault.
I dream about the old memories
about your hair
as the eastward wind
blows the world's radio
stations are yawning.

*



My darling, I've been thrust away
in the light of local lanterns, I ponder
the graveyard where the nameless
the addressesless lie; in its last row
a carved headstone says, "he
was a person like any other."
You also held me that day
and you buried me softly
are you saddened or am I?
Perhaps only the pigeons
traveling here from Sakhi (1).

*

Life is the little girl
my seventh year fell
in love with, and her smile
made my twentieth
an old event.
But do you remember the eighteenth
parchment? Wasn't it so white? You
skimmed through me, stumbling
upon my stutter.
A God's house called for prayer
birds flew, and no one felt love
toward me again.

*

In afternoons, I read Mayakovsky
but it no longer rains, my woman.

*

Later, the philosophy of Mulla Sadra.
Later, Aristotle. Later, ice-aged tears
in Birdseye, circling the arctic. Later,
nonbeliever butterflies die. Past The
Caucasian Chalk Circle. All these occurred
in the mornings when the sun surpassed
the muddy roofs, seized the middle
of our yard, and permeated
our bathroom door.

*



and I.

At the far right of Sulgara (2), you

and I.

In Bamiyan, Mashhad, Tehran, you

and I.

We are together, and I

cannot comprehend your bitter smile.

This afternoon, I leave with everything

you see in this poem

do you have anything

else besides “man is in a state of loss” (3)?

*

Since I've said goodbye to the streets

and their squares, stray dogs

have been resting.

Najma (4), my dear,

I know she may not know

about Kabul's dark remote

avenues where a young

poet recites her poems out loud.

Is it possible to tell

stories to oneself?

My faithful beggar, have you counted

your coins? The one that is absent

is my life. The one that circulates

the gambling table.

Which side of the coin is yours?

Though it doesn't matter.

I've lost both sides of it.

*

Life, you've tethered my hands

in a way that won't allow me to forget.

I sit across the loneliness of a dark bird

swallowing my eyeballs.

*

Aries 1359

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In the Hindu Kush mountain range, a village covered in the Oxus plain's depth has an old grave from where an ant emerges again, and in the spring's first solar light, the ants join you. He works every day. The darkest worldview creeps into my bedroom. And I go to work every day, and I listen to music every night, in the daylight, in the daytime.

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*

I heard you are the kind who likes to retaliate.
I heard a man's worth does not alleviate you
or the wrinkles on his face.
You stand still to strike back.
These hands of mine
this trapped heart of mine
without a brother or a sister
my tired feet
my eyes are among the plane trees.
I don't want you to see
this redness in my eyes. No, I have never cried.
The weather in this part of the world is cold.
In the cold, winter manifests itself
in my ankles. It moves toward my eye sockets.

*

Among ants, there isn't one who is poor.
And when I am here, the wheat farm is dried.
The drought in the city came after Moses' curse.
And to satisfy the pharaohs, women kept their hair
short.

*

The dearest garment of my despair
have you heard about the first man
who traveled to the moon?
When he arrived, his heart shriveled.
How can a person step on his own moon?
How can a person discover the moon?
How can someone bring the repository of all
rings and earrings back to the earth?
My heart, too, is shriveled.
A sparrow suffocates in it.

*

I tie my belongings to my left hand
like an armband.
I find wrinkles on my mother's face
on the world's map.
On the surface of which ocean
do these lonely islands live?
Is there an island that chooses
to be landlocked?

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Is there an ocean where its pirates
believe in small happinesses?
Is there an ocean where its tiny mermaids
achieve the ultimate bliss?

*

My hands are shoved inside your throat
to pull out all the poisons.
There's no one left on the wheat farm.
Ants are becoming very poor.
Oh, life, my heart aches like the stray
dog who saw his partner
leave, I cry
silently.

translated from the Persian by Hajar Hussaini

Read the original in Persian ([/poetry/after-my-own-death-s-asef-hossaini/persian/](#))

Listen to the original read by the poet:

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Read bios

[-]

S. Asef Hossaini was born in Balkh, Afghanistan, in 1980. He grew up as a Cold War refugee in Iran. He returned to Afghanistan in 2003, where he studied philosophy and sociology at Kabul University before moving to Germany in 2008 for his M.A. and Ph.D. in public policy and international conflict management. Hossaini has published three poetry collections: *این کفش های پیاده* (These Walking Shoes; Zhakfar Hussaini, 2007), *من در اثر ماه گرفتگی* (I, Child of Lunar Eclipse; Erfan Publishing Institute, 2007), and *چهار سیاره در اتاقم* (Four Planets in My Room; Self-published, 2012). His first novel in German, *Persönliche Liebe; globalisiertes Leid* (Private Love; Globalized Grief), was published in 2022 by the Austrian publisher Lifebiz20 Verlag. He is currently working as a researcher and online editor. He lives in Berlin.

Hajar Hussaini is a poet and translator from Kabul, Afghanistan living in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., where she is a visiting assistant professor of English at Skidmore College. Hussaini's first collection of poetry, *Disbound*, was published in 2022 by University of Iowa Press. A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, she is currently working on the English translation of an Afghan novel. Her work has also appeared in various journals, including *Poetry Magazine*, the Asian American Writers' Workshops' *The Margins*, and *Pamemar Press*.

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