The Expulsion

> For there is a time in the tide of the heart, when . . . we ask, O God, where is our home?
>
> **— Derek Walcott**

That summer, the locusts coughed red dust.
We packed the house and off the sofa's gridiron,
wiped limp afternoons, matte spatter of soup
knocked by our child elbows diving first
for the TV remote, silt of arguments,
and years Father hollered to Maradona's instep kick.
Father, who shivered desert storms to a whisper
each time he hummed for us aaj mausam bara
beimann hae bara beiman hae,
aaj mausam. Father, like the sea,
an expatriate that carries on despite this country's
covert disposals. That summer, father
tucked our passports close, a prosthesis. Two
plainclothes men cocked a gun at him, trawling
our house for his residence permit.
Their fingers leeched the ventral dimness
of closets with blame. Those last nights in Jeddah,
I watched him through the parted doorway,
its narcotic eye blearing the hooded lamps,
his shoulders simmered antennal to hazard,
his forehead cleaved, like the frontier
that threshed us back to Lahore, to its grease, & gangly
boys who beggar bagged goldfish
that eyed me obliquely from plump neon waters.
Most days, as Father idled the hour content
as a windblown shack, I pendulated,
thick with rot. Superfluous, my reluctant
music of leaving, and my lies
yes, we left my birthplace, we hated the weather.
What happens when we snipe truth, its hair-narrow bridge?
What happens when we spill fictions?

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Belonging, once terra firma, crumbles to smoke.
Mongrel, I huddle on rooftops, dog the city's last engine
that drones home. The red eye that blinks blinks
at the billboards' insomnia. All night,
the koel vibrates, irking the sleeping hopes of larvae.
Supine, shirtless laborers snore into the puckered moisture.
Father flicks past the news, like the news. How pathetic,
I think, how much like greed,
in these damp enervations, my private alphabet of loss.

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Jeddah

Paleolake of
the gone
girlhood,
of a father's
ambition.
Sand-starved
I bedouin
through time,
yet time,
a broken caravan,
stagnates in me
& my infant
screech clamors out
anomalous as
a flood
among dunes,
frictious as
the distant
movement
of beasts
I jackal-shadow
for the carrion
of your highways'
tyranny, your
cacti prick,
Mega-stores, &
your Mejdool dates
pyramided,
like an eyeless,
dispelling god
for whom I have
smashed
my itinerant feet.

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Human Capital

Tide-slurped, the shore
rocked my father's thirst,
eyed the day he, too, will
foray fishwards, his spine
full-mast, borderless as salt,
the ocean beneath him
his own deep-storied calling;
waters whistling, whistling
for weeks the big catch no
matter the bribing coastguards,
no matter the sea-gods'
cussing. My father thrummed
for distant coasts, tax-free
income, the day he too
will whip up some concrete
house on his shoreside
to vie for, a boy too green
to read what the ocean
before him archives: assets,
seized passports, obscene
fees the middle-men pimp from
those lost to richer shores,
lost, in thousands, to mega
cities they raise with ripped
palms, to filthy labor camps
at the backwater where,
ten to twelve, they sleep, hemmed
in by stray cats, rations,
and roaches. But a boy, my
father hungered, as a boy
will, for he knew the sea
is a tycoon, glib as oil,
and from eastward, it hovered
and it murmured his name.

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The Bride of the Red Sea

The hours, a desert, ran wasted.

My mother stared out at the new roads and freeways.

Gloss of urban sprawl the Americans laid out

ushered in the new. Not a being out there palpated

into sight. She fluffed tissue into roses, plucked

hair from floor tiles. Time sat fixed,

like a sacked king. From Urdu digests,

lurid contraband from Lahore,

the front cover women leered at her, some

knowledge clenched in their teeth.

This was before Father came home,

steaming flatbreads in tow. Before reruns

of *Awdat Asoid* and her bumbling Arabic.

Before the friends and the picnics by the sea.

Before the oil boom bloomed

into skyscrapers, mega-stores, and bizarre

monumental sculptures surged

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everywhere. She was twenty-two, newlywed.

in the city they called the bride of the turquoise sea.

Her restlessness, prehistoric, chafed

under. She hadn't known such loneliness.

She had yet to taste loss, its precise axle.

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