

“From Another Desert”

1.

Cries Majnoon:

Beloved
you are not here

It is a strange spring
rivers lined with skeletons

Wings beat
in the cages

letting the wind hear
its own restlessness

the cry of gods
and prisoners

letting me hear
my agony

2.

In the grief of broken stone
among the ghosts of saints and poets
the gods have lost their vermilion marks

No priest comforts their loneliness
on the courtyard of these ruins

only a beggar or two
who lean against the tombs of princes
on which grass

that true cloth
of the beggar

grows wildly-

Look, how a god returns
to his wrecked temple

clings to his marrow
frozen in bones of his worshipers

touches himself

as he extends the earth
like a begging bowl

in the grief of broken flesh

3.

Each statue will be broken
if the heart is a temple. When

the gods return, from the ends
of the fasting sky, they'll stand

in the rain and knock and knock.
They'll force open the heart.

In the grief of ruins, they'll pick
up their severed arms

and depart and depart and depart.

4.

There again is memory
at my doorstep—

jasmine crushed under
departing feet.

The moon extinguishes
its silver pain

on the window.

5.

Cries Majnoon:

Those in tatters
may now demand love:

I've declared a fashion
of ripped collars.

The breezes are lost
travellers today,

knocking, asking
for a place to stay.

I tell them
to go away.

All night they knock, asking
if the Beloved
had ever passed this way.

At night I keep
the heart shut.

I'm waiting for a greater madness:

to declare
myself
to the Hangman.

6.

His blood shines
he is ready to face doom

Just promise him the rain
and pour wine into his glass

His vein illuminated
his blood is ink

He's writing the world's sorrow

His blood is fire

When he arrives in tatters
at the gates of palaces

the beams the arches will burn down

Oh Silence
continue to echo
bring back answers from everywhere

7.

Who now weeps
at the crossroads,

remembers the directions
that led so soon

to betrayal,
the disappearance

of all wayfarers
when it was almost

the morning?
Some went back,

folding breezes
in their wallets.

Some ran ahead,
the sun divided

among them, eclipses
hidden in their eyes.

8.

Majnoon was again sighted
in the streets, intoxicated

as before, surpassing the rapture
of every mad lover.

9.

Majnoon
what will be revealed
by thinking the centuries to glass?

Look at this Persian miniature

In the lush wilderness of sorrow
your father

distempered with a blue innocence
has searched for you
among the living and the dead

Now he rests his head on an uncut sapphire
bereft of prayer

while in margins of gold
verses wear bracelets of paisleys
tied into golden knots of Arabic

and in another miniature
the world goes on without you:

A royal hunt in a delicate jungle

Horses gallop to the rhythm
of a dying dynasty
the elephants' trunks circled into numerals

On a tree a giant spider
its legs sharpened into pencils
presses their lead into the cobra's crown

The earth is a calligraphy of coils
a carpet of grass woven into scales

and in cloak laced with prayer
Prince Jehangir

soon to be emperor of Hindustan
rides the tiger

Ruby buttons glisten on his coat
drops of blood
that have caught him by the collar

Oh Majnoon
there is no justice

He will not dismount
in your wilderness of sorrow

10.

In prison Majnoon weeps for Satan:

And Iblis bereft of dreams would still not bow to man
Qais weep for Iblis a lover like you lover of God
that cruel Beloved Qais welcome the knives the stones
but never bow to man learn from Iblis survive somehow survive in Hell
each day this memory the echo of the Beloved's voice telling one to go to Hell

11.

The prisoners know they've been
eclipsed, that someone

greater than them is now
among them. For though they know

the rattle of bound ankles,
they've never heard

such sorrow before,
this pounding, this beating down of the floor,

this plaint,
all night, of feet in chains.

12.

Ambushed in century after century by the police of God
the broken Ishmaels cry out in the blazing noons

welcoming the knives the stones rained down on them

again declared madmen by the government of Sorrow

And Majnoon also among them with bare hands
digs graves in the desert

crying out for his dead Laila

his back broken by a giant teardrop
inside it the ruins of Jerusalem or Beirut

or another rival to the garden of paradise
where his heart broke and broke centuries ago

13.

The dead are here. Listen to survivors
search for screams to place on the corpses' mouths.

The self is lost, erased at this moment.
So reveal, quickly, a secret to me:

When, at last, that hour comes, who will lead me
through the catacombs to the swordsman's arms?

Will it be a long-lost friend, speaking of her,
of her hands digging out turquoise perfumes

from the air's mines? Will he bring a message
from her eyes, so far away now, gazing

at a dream in which the ghost of prisoners
are shaking bars till iron softens

into a song – everywhere the shadows
of my voice, everywhere a smokeless fire?

Tonight the air is many envelopes
again. Tell her to open them at once

and find hurried notes about my longing
for wings. Tell her to speak, when that hour comes,

simply of the sky. Friend, speak of the sky
when that hour comes. Speak, simply, of the air.