

Qasida in time slowed to the rhythm of cats by Dena Fakhro

- I. Day's orchestra of prayer and car-horns is muted
Even our Google location is suspended somewhere
For these desert-miles extend for days, for weeks
The roof over our heads scant shield
- Each masked approach is alert to one danger
A pathogen – might fundamentally alter our humours
While we await announcements, delay ceremonies
Crowns and numbers that leap between breath
- II. On pause, we give form to the feline shadows
Endless are days when these cousins of lions
Before holding still as sphinges
Our plot locked-down, a floating island
- The clock slowed, we exchange watches for sundials
As units: feeding time, excavations, ablutions
Our silhouettes thinly veiled behind lattices
Or draw refuge from sepia and shade under carriages
- III. Her early years feral, she arrived seeking a cat's cure
Since the shrug of her fur revealed blurred lines
Although the lamps of her eyes piloted by sage
Still thrilled for a rumble; she stole bulbul eggs
- Last Fall, in rain, she drove up again unannounced
That nightly touting for rough-trade, which
Put her gaming aside for home and comfort:
Slung beside a box of Tide, a laundry basket
- IV. Still peeping-toms continued to scale up lamp-posts
Followed her nightly pass along the interior wall
So that, two-months gone, as jasmine ripened
She emerged from its bowels bath-heavy
- On damp grass irrigated by dusk, she cooled
While each blade, whetted by near-equatorial heat
And we imagined those tiny lungs gestated
Or huddling against the cage of her ribs
- V. When three flames in her eyes narrowed to pitch
And mewling cries offered us signs for next season
Of nine lots, we wagered that hope might trump
All rough-cut gems laid with care on tiles one
- But last week the sky broke and our Eden cracked
Then, at the sound of thunder, fate flung a well-hung
But, on pivot and turn, the bloodied prowler hooked
Clawed and shelled, the desecration complete, when
- and all freight trucks still lassoed into pens
between dust-devils and minarets
when a world outside our front-gate is unhinged
from incubi, succubi, vampires and the jinn.
- that for every ill-chanced date, a single host –
attach toxins to the briefest of greetings
fret over vigils, fear more anointments, ragged
and sighs, then transform test positives into prey.
- sliding up garden vines like arabesques
incline to stretch the perimeter wall elastic
that guard lanterns and watchtowers
all villages, commerce, shopping-malls on-hold.
- measure hours between bird-song and nocturne
and brief homage to the deity of cats
have learnt their habit of siestas in haze
of disused cars, verandas and nature trails.
- and underfed; we named her Bathsheba
of Persian pedigrees (and some local talent)
and gas-light that steered her into our camp
from cradles of bougainvillea frames.
- abandoned all that shine from the streets
given her long-haired appeal, was easy
tuna, biscuits and a hairy-backed bathmat
and one rusted Hotpoint washing machine.
- waiting for blinds to drop, sleep-lights to dim
over obstacles coiled and sprung
to sweat and the oleander-bush shuffled in bud
grown too slow to catch flies and birds.
- her swollen belly, her labour unhurried
dimmed to green, dissolved to marsh
leaning into her organs, squeezing her flanks
a jostling queue waiting for first breath.
- a trio of kittens flexed their slippered backs
sock-shaped and kicking, pitching against the first
adversity; three blown seeds – piebald, rust and ash
by one, as she polished the buds of minute tongues.
- when whip lightning lashed out and tore up night
rival in her path; the twins she hurled to safety
the third from her clasp slinging him into constellations
Death strung another hostage upon a sunken back.