

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.