

POEM 1

The Cairo i have come to know is not a city of regrets

The Cairo i have come to know is the city of happenings overlaying happenings and overshadowing other happenings

Such happenings happen while other happenings happen and it happens to be just too much sometimes

but it also happens to be good enough when you want to silence that brain of yours that happens to crumble from all the happenings that happen around it

I have come to know it as the city of everything.

—the everything that takes down...everything else

—the everything that is too much at times, it can excite you

—and the same everything that is too much at other times, it can crush you

Make no mistake, it is the city of lights.

Well yes, there's a Paris within Cairo

—only with faded lights though

And it may seem like a fallen Paris,

Like an oppressed Paris where love takes the shape of hidden corners and allies that are just reasonably smelly

Allies that are no strangers to floods of lust

And laughter that was barely audible just a few years ago

Cairo, my dearest, there is a lifetime of possibilities

wasted in the spaces between the cars lining up on one of your lucky bridges

Mimicking the abstinence of your breathing human figures

The very ones who allowed the bridges' existence in the first place

Not to mention, a lifetime of choices

Hastily taken in your *fresh* air

As if last minute has just become the default and we're still digesting it

Cairo, i'm not sure if i should thank you or blame you for the company that's got me hung up on you now

I know you love presence

I know you love being here, there and everywhere

You are on my mind when it's cold in another part of the world and i remember your weather: warm in January, warm in may, warm in September

You're seeping through my nostrils as the smell of the food i burned stares me in the face and i cry

I cry not because i'll have to eat it either way

I cry because you made me believe so much that cooking was a gene passed down from my mother to me

And God! you just know how to hide in my happiness as i take a leap of faith outside of your territories

And in each and every street i walk in and find a broken lamp or a dent in a building

Cairo, you create the circumstances you wish for us to live in

You align the stars for our dreams

And build a universe to protect them

But just the same as you know how to love and to mend
You know how to leave and to hurt
And then you're too sad when we choose to feel nothing so as not to feel anything

The Cairo i have come to know is a heartbreaker
A heartbreaker that lets you know your friends after taking bathroom breaks
I cannot hug you, Cairo..you confuse me!
I can't tell if you are poetry or if you're just pretending to be
But I can confess this: you have turned me into the cheesiest poet
A Scheherazade that forgot to count the nights she spent creating alternate realities
Until they fumbled their ways into oblivion
Until she found the one original reality chasing her triumphantly,
When she least desired it

Cairo, you have omitted the aftermath of things;
Of happenings.
You have struck the kingdom of windows with your apathy
You have managed to keep the flower, a flower;
But only in name
We say we stay for the challenges your vibes engulf us in
But really,
They're challenges within us to have made it this far standing on your ground

Cairo, i hate to tell you that goodbyes have no colors when it comes to your streets
They're sounds and feelings instead
You can—actually, no, you're “allowed to”—forget your mother's face in this era
But never how she made you feel

Cairo, my love towards you always softens into hate
And my occasional hate towards you rebels back into love
As you become and keep on transforming into the Cairo i have come to know

POEM 2

Hey mom
This is crazy
This is exhausting
This is frustrating
This is amazing
This is the best thing i've done so far in my life

Hey mom
I think i'm more in control here
As much as they hurt,
Goodbyes suit me
it seems like my every time is once in my head:
I'm always a stranger to the strangers i meet
Outside of my head, i'm safe as long as i have supermarkets near me:
My wrongs are right when drenched in Listerine

Hey mom
I have gone through my stash of perfect timings and couldn't find the boy i loved
I searched the boxes full of notes of the things i've never said and the feelings i was too afraid to show
But, mom, you were mistaken
They were rusty
Dripping an unspoken declaration;
Denying the security
Seeping strength out of cracked hearts:
I have never known that kind of love
Only yours

Hey mom
I don't like it when people talk too much now
Nevertheless, i thank the skies for finding boredom in them more than i find it in myself
Sometimes i half listen
Other times i stare
Until their eyeballs become the world
So i pop them empty
Then run away
Although
This is the story you'll hear:
"She came, she saw, she left early"

Hey mom
I retrace my sanity in salad ingredients
Under lettuce wings is where i hide on bad days
Red beans are for angry days:
You'd always say "eat your anger, swallow it until it's paste then feed it to your rivals in that form, mushy and tasteless"
Tomatoes are my cheeks on good days
Carrots make my teeth sharper for harsher days
Olive oil is sweet summer days

Nuts are for the grades i'll never care about
And salt is the sea in grains, my peace of mind in a crunch and my better days when melt in my mouth

Hey mom
Today i camped on a bed of leaves at the foot of a mountain
I saw the moon handing over the sun the keys to another day
I saw the stars as they hid that secret in pride
And i realized i'm never going home again.

Hey mom
I looked in the mirror reflecting big fat carton boxes lying in a deserted apartment
A backpack by the window just at the far corner of my bedroom
that was also my living room
that was also my study
I saw this smile of the crazy and the truthful
And when i ducked in closer
I could see the stars with their secrets in their bellies dancing in the darkest circle of my eyes
I mouthed:
This has been crazy
This has been exhausting
This has been frustrating
This has been amazing

POEM 3

I give a part of the world away
When my legs are bare
And there's a cold breeze seeping through my window
I get one more chance to tell a story
To be slightly more free than all the prisoners i'll never know

My eyes would die for a minute
My heart would sink in the pillow
As strands of ideas hurry to call the first strum of imagination
Lost in the sheets
Anticipated and lost
Lost and anticipating
This is not the weight of a soul
This is the weight of the earth
Something binding and truer than truth
A version of myself i leave to dry at every door
Always wanting a different kind of heavy
The senses that would make me feel in layers
A small celebratory cake
Filling: unknown
Topping: an ocean of longing

Water and salt grow a mountain on my back
Speaks in storage formats
As a way of famishing the famine
Flooded with the surplus of salt water, yes
But singing with the (almost) pride of been there (almost) done that

They say they see the story in formation
With characters dying on the first line
Almost finished when it's almost begun
Now life is for the words that sprang the air
And air was for the consciously cautious
As they slid in more and more effort
More for conscious
More for cautious
Less paths for real stories
Less courage to seep in