

LOVE SONG FOR MY LOST CITY

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## A Love Song for My Lost City

Long-lost brothers and sisters  
come sit with me on the steps of my city  
listen as the music from the Irish's downstairs flat

mingles with the khoum in the Azar's upstairs flat  
like star-crossed lovers,  
come sit by me and share your reasons for staying

Is it the voices of the Supremes  
resounding in the school hallways?  
the counterpoint of Satchmo and Aretha wafting across the alley?

or is it how the elm trees  
arch over the streets  
making them as cool and shady as a gothic cathedral?

possibly you have overheard  
the cicadas as they gossip in the branches?  
witnessed the cardinals spread their tails like Chinese fans?

or perhaps you have watched as the children  
touch each others' faces, delight in the hair  
that feels different from their own?

Do you hear them chatter like birds as they play together?  
little sparrows splashing in the sidewalk puddles!

Friends, come be with me for a while  
linger over a supper of bread and soup  
bring your bowl to my table

there is plenty for everyone  
there will be laughter for dessert  
good wine and dancing for your pleasure;

Do not dwell on the fact  
that the wealthy are packing their bags  
behind closed doors

have put For Sale signs in their windows  
pay no attention to the racists  
who hide their fears behind false excuses and accusations

Good Friends, talk to me of the things you love  
tell me your dreams for your children  
and grandchildren

show me the pictures of your family, the photos you keep in your wallet  
do not let the hot night keep you alone  
in your apartment

come into my garden  
sit down with me among the roses  
breathe deeply of the peonies and forsythia

then come savor the raspberries with me  
from the bushes planted by my grandmother  
and my grandmother's grandmother

let us press the stains of our fingers together  
our combined hope mingled, pulsing for the future of our city

and won't you sing me the songs from your childhood  
tell me about the times when tears of laughter  
wet your faces?

how the aunties  
cradled you in their aprons  
the uncles tickled you until you shrieked and begged for mercy?

My Friends, do not dwell on the things you cannot change  
perhaps we can change them together

Let us not light the fires of envy and destruction  
remember our promises to cherish each other

Good Neighbors, be calm when the Man raises his fist at you  
when Whitey threatens to destroy you  
it is your dignity they wish to steal from you

don't let them!  
speak softly but speak in your own behalf; be adamant on behalf of others.

Good neighbors, we must protect the women and children  
pray for the teenagers and the leaders our nation,  
for the talk show hosts to stop distorting, the politicians' lying

Let us turn off the noise of the televisions and cell phones and instead plant new seeds in the garden  
remind our children of our love for them,  
discipline them fairly

Let us shelter the child  
who has been abandoned;  
speak out for the poor who cannot defend themselves

My sisters and brothers  
may we remember the wounded  
and bandage them when they are broken

let us not be afraid to put our hands on them  
that they might be healed,  
hold their hands when they are dying

Let us be kind to the strangers among us  
welcome them to our table  
enlist them to help rebuild our city

Dear Ones, let us resist the urge to speak out in anger  
please be kind to yourself  
when you are lonely

can we not gather to listen to the sounds of the wind in the branches?  
to plant new trees by the water?  
invite those who left to return to us and our city?

let us ask them to join us  
on the steps of our city  
to listen to its new music

Perhaps we can ask them to teach us  
the words to their music  
ask them to share their kind thoughts with us.

Let us remember to invite them to sit and chat with us on the steps of our city  
ask them to forget their reasons for leaving  
suggest they stay when the talk turns to silent

let us treasure the moments of thoughtful silence

Only then will we be able to ask them to share with us their hopes and dreams for our city  
only then will they be free to listen.

And then, Dear Ones, let your gaze linger before you leave my table  
let me memorize your smiles and your laughter,  
let me dream we might meet again with the sunrise.

Too Much Happiness

Dew on fresh cut grass  
And new day  
Honey-warm and slow-spreading

Buzz-buzzing like bees in Granny's lilacs  
Hum, humming  
Old ancient song

And, somewhere  
Radio  
On neighbor's window ledge

Playing *Whenever I See Your Smiling Face*—

And this day like every other  
We girls and boys  
Filing in and out of Scripps Elementary

Morning sun all gold medallions  
On window panes  
Sea-smooth blue

And starlings stuttering in catalpa trees  
As cars careen down Kercheval  
Speeding off to work

Drivers dancing  
In their seats  
To jackhammer staccato

Bass and blues  
Like train engines in the bones

And, Oh! We just so happy  
Being children  
Teasing each other merciless

Clouds telling little white lies  
In damp-bright  
Early morning air.

Heart Houdini  
Bandit  
Backdoor man  
Con artist  
Heart Houdini  
Eyes like hazard lights  
Middle-of the-Night  
Repo man  
Come  
To steal  
My heart back  
Same guy  
Picked the lock  
Undid  
The tumbler  
Reset  
My passcode  
Pilfered my pearls  
Hacked my Hootsuite  
Said he loved me  
Sneaked himself  
Past my better judgement  
Let me  
Embarrass myself  
In public  
When heads turned—  
The midnight wind's  
Sleight of hand  
Up under my skirt  
At that corner  
Where he met me  
Where I waited  
Waited  
The neighbors  
Watching from behind their curtains

Stupid  
Street lamp!

\*After hearing an NPR call-in talk show called Love Alert

And There Is Eternity

And today she promises  
she will go there  
and buy the house back,

the one I sold when she was small  
and live in it forever because  
the bloom of light from the street lamp

outside the bedroom window  
spun the curtains into gold  
and in the deepest hour

the trains rumbled past  
making the windows  
sing a little tune

and the floorboards hummed  
as if dreams  
tunneled under

and we were safe there together  
she in her little bed beside my big one  
where we reached our hands out

and held on tight  
until morning  
painted the walls

so delicious a yellow  
you wanted to lick them

and she swears she loved  
the smell of moss  
that made a tiny carpet

just outside the back door  
(though I don't remember this)  
where the wind chimes

argued day and night  
and the spruce trees  
whispered he kind of secrets

(continued on next page)

that made a little river  
inside her heart—  
the same river

I kissed a boy in  
when I was her age  
and let him kiss me back.



## Had Things Been Different

I might have run off with him  
As was my first inclination  
But that would have meant  
Leaving the children behind,  
My book unread  
And spring was in full bloom  
The cottonwood spilling its seedlings  
And all that “cotton” flying with the bad  
Company of the willows, the fluff  
Sticking to our eyes

And maybe if the birch trees and alders  
Hadn't been shedding  
Or the oaks filling with staminate flowers  
For the second time  
And the grasses releasing so much pollen  
We might not all have been  
So completely miserable

I could have just disappeared  
Mid-morning or evening  
The dog in the yard,  
the children in the shadows,  
Porch lights just coming on  
And the seventeen-year cicadas  
Ratcheting up their relentless refrains

Given the right circumstances  
I suppose I might have been happier  
The sunsets brighter  
The days more exotic—

But bring me the books again  
That I might reread them,  
Might find myself on a different page  
Find him somewhere in an adjacent chapter  
The corner turned over—  
My name still emblazoned  
On the flyleaf of his heart

## Both Our Hearts Crossways

Lying crosswise on the bed  
Your head hanging over one edge  
And mine the other,  
The sky outside  
An upside-down lake  
And somewhere a lawn mower  
Imitating a motor boat  
And we float here a while  
As if we have soared into another world  
Which in a way we have, I suppose  
You in the book spread open across your heart  
And me thinking of those paintings  
in the Louvre of Flying Lovers  
A light breeze shifting the curtains  
The harsh words we said an hour ago  
Lifting and levitating like dust motes  
in the slant of sun.