نارنج‌ها

Mina Zohal
I’m always talking about visibility. I want to describe to you the light coming in from the window, the way it frames your face, the shadows across the kitchen floor. You said: bacheem I’m lost anymore. We discuss your sickness and Ama jaan coming. Ama jaan tamame englisi-esh ra faramoosh karda. But she remembers Aamrika: the strange order of it. I try to tell you about the light coming in from the window, the way it frames your face, the blindness coming for you as the past pursues. I try to tell you that speed increases as momentum accumulates. But, you don’t listen. You say: bacheem lutfan, we need to clean the basement, it’s a disaster completely.

Sticks spilt and slivered under a different portion of sky. We become accustomed. We don’t.
The checkpoint is so narrow so choked, chaotic. I think: they should move the checkpoint to a wider spot. There’s no room for this hustle all this yelling all this trying to pass into and out of. Soldiers scramble to scan vehicles, checking underneath for explosives. To peer into windows. To assess. Everyone honking and some trying to go around the queue like: I don’t have time for this shit. Confident in their ability to not tip over in the ravine. But alas, they don’t get to go, they get yelled at they get machine guns waved at them, machine guns pounded on the sides of their trucks, on the hoods of their cars. I can see the green again. Exhaust billowing everywhere. Ama jaan puking in the back of the taxi, bakhatere da motar mareez meysha. I wanted to stop a few miles back to take photos for Yalda jaan: the trees lining the road as we pass through Laghman, but Kaka jaan said: nay bacheem nameytaneem, khatarnak ast. We pass the checkpoint and I cover my face bakhatere chaudari nameykonam. Rickshaw sugarcane Nangarhar University.

There’s all this drama about the oranges. Supposedly Atiq and Zahed took a bunch of their bros to our grove and filled up bags with oranges. We discuss the recent distribution of the land. The signatures. The bad blood. We discuss kaka Agha Gul’s exhaustion. We discuss disgust in an informal way. We discuss the problem of multiple coinciding/contradicting narratives of events. You say the word: dorogh. I say the word: bubakhsh.
Kochi shahr e anaar goats in the road. Oo raa besyar ziiba ast. Third most dangerous highway in the world. Abandoned U.S. military base wasted and trashed acres of land. They make a huge-ass mess everywhere they go and then just leave it there. I tell Khala jaan: please don’t throw your plastic water bottle out the window.

These days I’ve been measuring the partition, my adrenalin, your hair. I measure the hours and the ways in which they distort us. The hours climb on us, maa khasta shodeem.

I would like to be able to describe the falling back and how it wasn’t such a bad thing. I hug myself in order to keep my arms from flapping wildly while we shop. I don’t squak or scream while you complain about a shirt that costs four hundred Afghs. I want a chapan, I want to wrap myself in black and black sunglasses in long black lines down and down. We come in and out from shop to shop. Ama jaan says: tol sarrii laywanay di, rolling her eyes.
At the bottom of all this (somewhere beneath the grass in the cold freshness), a cure appears and retreats, intersecting with our logic our sentimental parts our missing coordinates our predation. I paw at the earth. I dig up small rocks. I clean the dirt from my nails. I say: I saw something down there.

To never hear your name mispronounced. To gather up exile in your hands and say: don’t let me be lonely. We huddle up on the toshuk at mehmani everyone watching us. Don’t eat the gandana you say. We take so little. We are so tired. We will go back voluntarily our reluctance visible. This is a weird house. Bacheem it’s not a house, they built two big rooms, they call it a house, makes no sense completely. I go out back to witness the specter, the frame, the particles of neglect sticking to my chupluks. I walk through, touch the walls, listen. I feel its echo its temperature. Kaka jaan is irate at the condition of his brother’s house. He points to the neighbor’s house and says in English: that is good this is bad. He compares the varying conditions between this house and the neighbor’s. Built the same year. He remembers the architectural project during the sixties. This one shambled that one lovely. I don’t want to get involved, so I say mmmmmmm and gesture to Atiq, pointing to the thing they built: ein khana e now ast, kho? Bali kho. Mmmmm, I pat him on the shoulder, his distress visible, tashweesh nako Lala jaan. Kaka jaan is yelling at him. I take my uncle’s arm and rest my hand on his back. Meyfahmam kaka jaan. Ein khana besyar maqbol bood. He is so angry he cries.
You guys fight for five days in Jalalabad, sometimes at Kaka jaan’s house, sometimes at Atiq’s. You all say things you shouldn’t. You all sign things nobody wants to sign. You all settle on agreements nobody agrees with. Saieda’s brother keeps staring at me. Ama jaan tells Khala Rogul that her servant’s bamya is too greasy. She feeds it to us for three days.

After the breaking strain your back still straight but hurt a bunch of Afghs still in your pockets. You say: this is no kind of life in this country. Ma barat muta a ser hastam. You are dizzy for months after.

Mehda-am dard maykona.
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