





Acknowledgements

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Opening quote from Rosemarie Waldrop, *The Reproduction of Profiles*, New York: New Directions, 1987.

farah



by samar abulhassan

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to say *everyone calls me* ____ highlights a public realm not private. your nearby posy amused, invites them in for hamburgers. did you see the way she laughs when her cousins flip inside jokes. once you are home it is always more guttural, far reaching. as in, *they could bear it all the way from ford road*. i wish to play you like a musical note, a dash here, a scratch here. she traced his perfect sentence in mid-air, reveling in the carefully-raised bumps over her crooked gate.

i stormed between incisions and wanting to calm a child upset to have never skinned a knee. but a list of sensitivities to liquids could not be strained dry, and exposure wanted in proportions. approach the wishing pond, which is still that, but the coins have been emptied. as to finding refuge in a sentence, i took turns drowning the knocks at the door, while letting in strangers that insisted on glowing the bruises. “come into your own” suggests a stepping in that may or may not be supple.

What the ear once spurns the softer version swells up: it is given self-esteem. illuminate contrast, adjust your name to a shape her vocal cords are capable of making. the effort, if it does not trigger slideshow of the ways in which you have been slighted, invites a chance score that is neither ancestral nor contemporary.

enter into someone's home and witness a private exchange, watch your friend become disassembled. i felt relieved when she snapped at her sister, because in that space a recklessness was revealed which could not happen between us.

when she cries a thing or origin spills out into the
field. when she cries simply americanize your boots to
remember the dance. when one of you exhibits
wondrous breathing another charms a flower with
bug spray. at any moment, flippantly create an
opening. it isn't that the cracks do not sustain, but
craving a crescendo you feel inside deaf ears.

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to call forth the word (a partial inheritance) linger for
a while on ■ a stretchy way to let farah into this
sentence. bobbing in lukewarm bathwater which
figment will she resist. recalling a time when someone
pressed an ivory stone into your palm, folding in your
fingers one by one, you broke

some insist that traveling is a mere distraction, a moving away from intimacy or depth. but in places of transit, farah sinks into bucket seats. open up like a giant to the man sitting next to you who has sailed the mediterranean and pretend that it is this which fastens you to him. the shape of our hands display distinct stabs at happiness hovering between illness and well-being.

dear farah

(on a day, far away, when all
the swing sets are free


when the bilingual aide showed up all soldiery at your
classroom door today, did you imagine your
classmates' heads to be yellow poppies? who's to say
about anyone's back signals, their divided pain. she
had no idea the trouble she was causing by insisting
on arabic, *as if you had gone to school together*. she wanted
you to hug her, you saw holes in her skin. and then
your teacher nudged you away with a whisper, and to
your relief, in the hallway an empty house resumed.

xoxo



it is unclear which farah has the flimsiest taste. we all shop for flimsy things now and bow in the presence of faltering thread-lines: pink, aquamarine, yellow. some take turns massaging the fabric swells and gaps in the pits of arms. *there, there*. i like to dance in nightclubs that are the on the verge of collapsing, she thinks, when her brothers go to town comparing television models.

tire of your mother surfacing, but welcome her insistence on exfoliation, write *float farabs in a quarry* and instead hear, *wash the walls with bloody falls*. no usual dismemberment is necessary, and a cheerful temperament is no worse than a despairing one. so that inside a name a joy might curb life's small and large disasters. bend your knee to the water. veer course in the other direction to meet the awkward palm. fall in a room with "another" one of you and you share the same faulty ankle but lend me a stronger arm to dance with currents. in muscle testing, your non-dominant hand is more likely to tell the truth.





i still do the math when deciding when to call you.
night grows steeper where you are as do the stains at
the bottom of coffee cups. when you eat blackberries
from the sides of the road, is the lingering marked - -
is it a cult?

be careful to recover the glass pieces carefully . . .

love,
farah

once my mother perfumes her wrists she will gaze at us more lovingly. on a whim one morning farah read faces expertly, but one's own ridiculous dreams get lost in accommodating. returning home she found the trips to the bakeries exquisite, as if the container of oven suddenly sprouted to make private encounters possible. in the night when prejudices surface slip a syllable into a mosaic, a funnel of impromptu machinery.



do you still go to your job at the bank?
your love for the english language swells and
repulses. when the director greets you and
asks how it is *really* pronounced, keep him at
bay: say it swiftly. i want to tell you stories, but
sweet hybrids, partial recognition.

we are living,

whether we meet at a peak or in haste .

..

xoxo

farah

at the school intersection, we meet anew. for the
guard in bright apricot crosses you to ensure your
safety. mouthing an articulation your parents did not
intend can't anticipate the springs beneath
floorboards. farah's aunt calls her on the other side of
the street, smiling. which wind scrapes which whistle
blow. motion amplifies and dissipates. when farah
stretches out her arms to meet her, the palms meet at
a distance, brewing a heat as if to contain a flying,
furry animal.

dear farah,

without tools, finally. one is filled up after dinner by an epic goodbye. you have to admit, you aren't so committed. i keep getting on my hands and knees, feeling for a more intimate language to correspond in. we do not greet the days with equal rigor. what folds in on itself, the mind's preoccupations. would it be different if we switched places, walked a mile in each other's flip-flop? only you understand why i can say *pie* but not *cobbler* . . .



to now envision him reentering the room a squeaky little boy not minding his screeches. it's true that he might not notice the whispers, but insist on this and you miss his grand gestures. the sighs may be a sign of grief, but wide-faced he cupped the room to dispel the dome of loneliness. it isn't that all the alphabets come together in a vegetable garden, but sidewalk stenciling insists on increments of pleasure.

imagine a room full of farahs, tugging at their ears and spilling out of their seats to intercept imminent inflamed pronunciations. i am getting up and shutting this farah out, not to invite in something more milky, but rather to filter out fathers who insist on pressing out the breath between flowers.

(later unrobe them, tug at their chests, trace their faces unharmonic, not to unsound a howl if you don't trust me, i can't help you

she dreams of vials lined up on a shelf-boat
rearranging the sea. in each bottle an isolated sound, a
distinct temperature. each tinting her palm with
complexions made radiant from the humiliations of
children. when the salesclerk revealed her name to her
in a barely audible whisper, she was saddened that on
her way out, her joints creaked with glee. what
hiccups and fractures, bend of flight. it was only after
tasting the watermelon-flavored gumdrop and the
pink had gone slack, that she recalled the man's right-
eye tremors.

desperate to pacify his hunger, mistake his pangs for
yours when he howls your name. dress down, receive
lessons in hygiene. farah dream the same dream
feature a black eye that will not heal not yours
choose to see at the end of a tunnel a bicycle legs
don't breathe with lungs you hose it delicately be
wilder eyes each time with kinder gauze reach up
you want him to fill up when company
arrives trace the space hums inside pressure cookers
cross-eyed, decorate a patch or a posture *which* eye
is lazy or needs evening

dear farah,

tonight i dream of you running the whole school track. the wind will clip the cheers from the bleachers and pin them to your spine. to ease side-splitting pain. disappear your armor on the playground. little legs scattering. even while my mother summons lemons from the upstairs fridge, i gather staircases and the giddy songs of jump ropers.



within a geometry a name emits a hue farah-like,
though in a euphoric nation without farahs a glaring
and a witnessing and a welcome fearlessness. i knew a
man who was raised in a grove of orange blossoms. i
gifted him with a bottle of the essence, but the scent
was too intense and could not be distributed like gold
dust.

hold a name in your palm and lint lifts from its
syllables, cried a porch wind swirling inside drinking
glasses, dissolving smaller ice cubes. don't mix your
spinal fluid inside, leave the home pristine this time.
even if alert to the gaze from across the street, farah
feel your legs to mean that being cross-eyed collects
disparate choreographies.

revel in the impossibility of the spilling. bring your family and friends together in a restaurant. your mother amused by your friends' versions of you, attempts to support their stories. i watched her interact with her mother in russian, her brow furrowing inside her mother tongue. i wanted to switch places, to receive the undressed words that could only be offered in the context of a set of history and memory.

before the ceremony ended, I ran out of flower petals
and witnessed my flailing hands. to think that our
parents hold rich lives that have nothing to do with
us, that they might be most at ease with themselves
not in our company. raise children, my quivering
daughter. these are words your mother would never
say to you. intend what you like, a syllable or a
rosebush has its own course. bring farah in for a
cameo appearance, layer her with bright cottons to
anticipate weather conditions. i prayed for a vicious
wind to make slit marks translucent, but instead
watched a watering can pass between hands.

that one version begins an association with paper,
another with fabric. stretchy, unformed, learning to
trust. *ab.* first grasp a new sound with little effort, the
larynx adapts before it realizes the thing foreign. *“it’s
not really pronounced that way.” “how’s it really pronounced?”
“it’s really pronounced like this:*

i coaxed her apart, she spun out of my embroidery. she soaped my skin. I didn't want to desire anything, or dispose of what scared me the most. a () is not always written. it is (a small symbol added later). guess which hue the reader is familiar with, and risk muddying all your reds. she walks with a seasick houseboat radiating thin inside her belly, sinking stagefrights. when I hung all of my shameful gestures on a line made taut by a brisk wind-import, my pruny fingers instead breathed, "not to return intact." you wonder about being mis-witnessed, you didn't want anyone to see you so backward. now your mother slips away to her room to get dressed, not to wake up in her own grove but so that you might skin another costume.

1

I tried to understand the mystery of names by staring into the mirror and repeating mine over and over. Or the word “me.” As if one could come into language as into a room. Lost in the blank, my obsessive detachment spiraled out into the unusable space of infinity, indifferent nakedness. I sat down in it. No balcony for clearer view, but I could focus on the silvered lack of substance or the syllables that correspond to it because all resonance grows from consent to emptiness. But maybe, in my craving for hinges, I confused identity with someone else.

Rosemarie Waldrop

this book is dedicated to my mother and father

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samarabulhassan@hotmail.com

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samar abulhassan