



S H A M S



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Artist's Statement

This collection of poems is inspired by an interview I conducted with Shams, a Palestinian girl born to a Jerusalemite mother and a father who grew up in Hebron as a refugee. Shams was born in Jerusalem and grew up in Ramallah in the West Bank. Although Shams came from a well-to-do family, it was largely her playing a musical instrument, the violin, that helped shape her educational trajectory and distinguished her and the opportunities available to her compared to her siblings and many other Palestinians her age from a similar background. Hence, music is a running theme in the narrative.

The poems not only reflect Shams' educational experiences but also her interest in music and the environment as I found it important to present a more holistic, multidimensional image of her as a person. Although the different poems can be enjoyed by a wide range of audiences, I imagine young adults and adults would be most able to appreciate them.

The poems are divided into three parts as represented by the three parts of an orchestra concert. The first section, Overture, consists of one poem about where Shams was born and why her mother chose to give birth to her there, reflecting the influence of policy on people's decision and the inequality and injustice she experiences. The second part, Concerto, defined as a solo made of three contrasting movements, includes three poems about three passions and experiences integral to Shams' narrative and tied to her education: music, travel and land (or nature). The third part, Symphony, which in music terms is a complex and long sonata with a variety of sounds, here shows three different educational realities: Shams' father's education, Leila's education and Shams' education; the collection of poems ends with a snapshot of Shams' present and the education and opportunities she had that got her to where she is today.

All the poems are told from Shams' perspective except "Shams on the Other Side". This poem is about a girl Shams saw during her last visit to Ramallah. The girl is around the same age as Shams, probably grew up in Ramallah but received all her education in the West Bank. The poem provides insight into the reality of many young Palestinians in the West Bank who, despite being highly educated, do not have many of the opportunities Shams had and struggle to find jobs upon graduating, as Shams pointed out during the interview. "Shams on the Other Side" is my attempt at showing this struggle through the eyes of someone who is similar to Shams. I chose to name the girl in the poem Leila, a female name derived from the Arabic word *layl*, which means 'night' in contrast with my participant's chosen name, Shams, which means 'sun' in Arabic. I also chose to place the poem right before "Lucky" to highlight the contrast between their two realities.

These poems are largely based on the interview with Shams, however, artistic license was taken when necessary.

I. Overture

Paper Lottery

1994

In Palestine
Paper
Classifies
Builds
Steals
Means Nothing
Means Everything.

My mother
Insisted
My siblings and I be born in
her city,
Golden, contested
Jerusalem
So we could get
The Blue Card.

But "Permanent in Palestine
Means they can take it
anytime."

My two sisters and brother
All got Jerusalem papers.
My sister
Got the equivalent of a visa.
My younger sister and brother
Got the Blue Card.
I, the eldest,
Got nothing
From Jerusalem.
Better Luck Next Time.

II. Concerto

Kamaan

Maple wood
Bow
& String

Given me
more than
I can count

Passport
Key
& Education

No wonder
Arabic for 'violin'
Also means 'more'

From the River to the Sea

*"As a Palestinian, I value my land
and I value my presence on it." - Shams*

Azure sea
Emerald trees
Blessed earth
You
Never cease
To amaze me.

I grew up in a gray city of concrete,
The blue of Haifa's port
And the green of
Jaffa's orange orchards
Eluded me.

No matter
How far
Those few miles
Are made to be though
My Palestinian school books
always
Assured me
They are
A part of
My Palestine,
from the river to the sea.

And for that I am
Forever grateful.

III. Symphony

Second Intifada Memories

Home

Taken over

By Israeli soldiers

Camouflage Suits and Sweat

Sleeping in my bed

Drinking Mama's lentil soup

A twisted West Bank

Goldilocks tale

The empty lot

Where my cousins and I play

The perfect bulldozer parking lot

The roof

Where Mama hummed songs

As she hung our laundry out to dry

Their watch tower

We cram into my uncle's apartment

Uncles, aunts, cousins, siblings

Days melt into nights

One big, long family sleepover

Fourth grade was two months shorter that year

No school for weeks

But that didn't matter

As much as survival

"Life beyond this apartment

ceased to exist".

Baba's Investment

Baba,
Once
Refugee child,
Walked every day
To the end of Hebron
To get to school.

Shoes soaked
On winter days
Feet wet and tired.

Baba
Left school
In the sixth grade
To work.
UNRWA schools
Provided
no incentive
To stay.

Baba,
Today
Businessman,
Always
Says my education
Is his
biggest investment.

Note: Baba means 'Dad' and, here, refers to Shams' father

Shams on the Other Side

Twenty-four

Pretty girl behind the counter

Leila

Had dreams

Studied business

Or, was it accounting?

She spent the year after graduating
counting the hours in a day

24

memorized the pattern of cracks
on her bedroom ceiling

Never looking at the degree hanging on the wall
as she waited.

Today, you'll find her

In the best

Cosmetics shop

In Ramallah

Selling lipstick the color of blood,

Hair dye as yellow as the sun

Still counting

The hours in a day.

Lucky

2017

I sit in my Paris apartment
On a Sunday evening
Fingers laced around
A warm cup of chamomile tea
"I am very lucky," I say.

I grew up in Ramallah,
Went to a private school
Not too far from my house.
No checkpoints to cross.
A taxi dropped me off
At the gate
Every day.

Music
Took me
To Spain,
To New Hampshire's Apple Hill,
To a prestigious boarding
school
Across the river.

For college,
San Antonio's Trinity
University
Opened its arms,
Let me explore
Nicaragua, Guatemala and Costa
Rica
And then Spain again.
I studied Economics
And Urban Studies
Because I enjoyed them.

Paris
Called my name
For grad school.

"I am very lucky," I say.
Whatever I do,
I'll make sure it's positive.
My education
Is my
Resistance.



شمس



قلیبتین

