

AZRA ABBAS

Seven Poems from
*The Far Side of Wonder**

ALONE AS I AM

When love comes
it doesn't seek the body
it flows toward the other heart
So was my journey toward you.
Today I'm alone.
Your love now seeks my body—
just my body.
I search inside your heart—
I see a void.
I shall not let you be alone.
For when a body touches its mate
with nothing in its heart
one can sense loneliness
from afar.

(“Jēsē Maiñ Tanhā Hūñ,” 82)

YOU'RE WHERE YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN

Cigarette
earlier touching my lips
now floats in the Thames
Does the river know
the feel of such a touch?

**Ĥairat kē Us Pār* (Karachi: Scheherzade, 2006).

Touches are never forgotten.
In the midst of chilly, gusting winds
standing before a poster of Marilyn Monroe
Unbidden I salute her beauty.
Beauty mustn't die.
Beauty must abide for all time.
But no—
I see the young man coming along
Eyes slip away from the poster
to behold beauty in motion.
If
Time hadn't propelled me so far forward
I would have kissed you.
I light a cigarette
and drop it in the Thames
so the river might extinguish it.
The last of the cigarette-gone-dead bobs
as though smiling at me saying:
You're where you've always been.
Time—
Look! it stands behind you.

("Tum Vahiñ Hō," 38–39)

DURING THE LAST RITES

Remember—
During the last rites of love
in stilly solitude
among other things
I offered you the final gift of love:
my virgin scent
melding with your sweat.
The evening had started with a kiss—
the first ever—
and was lost in the darkness
yet love was happy
at the spontaneity of assault
celebrating its victory.
Isn't its memory

a gift
you received that day?
(“Ākhrī Rusūmāt kē Daurān,” 79–80)

THIS RESPITE MINE

Vacuous days
burrow themselves a place in my heart
as if it was some empty stretch—
denying me my time
in the cavern of blissful calm
my dreams too.
They see me in the vegetable patch
planting a sprig of mint
and conspire together—
 the wicked bird
 she too chimes in
 gleefully wagging her tail in the thick foliage
as if they would annul this respite of mine
this charity of dreams.

(“Mērī Yeh Mohlat,” 26)

EMPTY BENCH

A day will come
that I'll forget all this
the severity of the time even
when my heart was rife with pain.
I'll be the white bench
that remains empty
so I may sit on it
and stare into the expanse
where drops of water
like some formless substance wait
to become the apparel of the wind.

(“Khālī Benč,” 25)

ACROBAT

He walks on stilts
to look tall
and drunk
he does his act.
The stilts so high
they would have made his mother cry—
had she but seen him—
and his lover too
who warms the bed of another man now.
The acrobat lost his lover
'cause he couldn't play his
tricks
for her.
And ever since
he's turned to this trick:
this walking on stilts.

(“Bāzī-gar,” 35)

NOT EVER

You can't assail my heart
like a thought
or fill my eyes
like a dream.
This moment, right now,
I can see you
can touch you
and the tips of your fingers too—
as they busily pack the bags—
can collide with mine.
But when
all this is over
I'll make you a memory
and store it with
those others
I've long forgotten.

(“Nahīn,” 51)

—Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon