Phallic Worshippers

Nima Shasavari



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A WORD WITH YOU

In the name of Freedom, the sole savior of all living beings, I consider it my duty that the following words appear at the beginning of my books, so that all who encounter them may become aware of this request.

Nima Shahsavari set out to write books so that, through them, he might call some back to themselves, invite others to the path of freedom, awaken awareness in those willing to see, and thereby disseminate his thoughts.

He regarded it as a disgrace to build a trade upon his struggle and to stain that noble struggle with material gain

My purpose and ideal have never been concealed from anyone, nor do they require extensive inquiry to be understood, for I have always spoken plainly and transparently. Yet for those who remain unaware, let it be stated once again.

I rose to stand against the boundless oppressions imposed in the name of God, Allah, Yahweh, Jesus, Man, or any other title under which power has continually been mistaken for purpose and ultimate truth.

I rose to seek the freedom of all living beings.

A freedom eternal in nature, founded upon a single law: respect for all life and the refusal to inflict harm upon other living beings, whether plant, animal, or human.

I would consider it a disgrace to violate this law of liberation in pursuit of that very ideal, freedom itself, and thereby become the cause of suffering for another living being.

With the aid of modern science and technology, it is no longer necessary to follow the path of previous generations, nor to depend upon paper for the dissemination of books. Paper is taken from the noble bodies of beautiful trees and comes at the cost of their lives, contributing to the destruction of nature.

I have never published my writings upon paper, upon the lives of trees. My sole request of publishers is that these works likewise never be printed on paper, whether for profit or for the purpose of promotion and public awareness. Today, technology offers us the means to stand against the destruction and death of these noble living beings. Therefore, if you regard yourselves as advocates of freedom, you would surely refrain from participating in the killing of nature even without this appeal. And if profit remains your primary concern and you insist upon pursuing this trade, technology still offers a path free from the slaughter and mass destruction of trees, allowing your actions to appear just and worthy of respect in the eyes of myself and other free thinkers.

In the hope of freedom and liberation for all living beings.



NIMA SHAHSAVARI

CHAPTER 1

How slowly and heavily she steps, as if dragging a great weight behind her. It is as though the earth might swallow her at any moment, or perhaps she herself is trenching the joyous surface of the earth, sinking inward with every heavy stride. What is occupying her mind once again, pulling her brows together in that fierce frown—those formidable brows that, with a delicate fringe, could have been beautiful enough to bring all beholders to their knees? Oh, heavens, I have spoken blasphemy once again; once more I have mocked all sacred things. A woman was not brought into the world to be displayed, and that is the sole business of the promiscuous. The uglier we are, the purer we remain, and the more favored in the eyes of the great Lord of the heavens.

This small window facing the sky and the view of this humble alley have become my entire life. A cramped alley that cannot be more than three meters wide, flanked by two-story houses facing one another. In this time, I have memorized every single brick and every characterless facade. I know precisely what hour each neighbor steps out onto their balcony and how they survey the entire neighborhood; I know what each person is doing in their home right now and what they will have to do at another hour. These anticipations consume a portion of my life and leave me once more alone in this small room.

For a short while now, this room has been mine. After all those hardships, after all that dust, after living amidst an unfinished house, we finally managed to complete the construction, and now I can spend some time in solitude within this room—even though this moment of solitude will not last long. Locking the door is counted among the cardinal sins, but at least I can close it. Yet even that, after the passing of a short while, is flung open by the concerted effort of one family member or another, and I must forever remain within reach of this mob.

Just like right now, as the sound of Mother's footsteps passing through the alley and arriving at the house caused the door to burst open all at once. I perceive the sound of her tread from several paces away and know she is heading straight for my room. Throughout the entire time I sit behind

the window, I must keep all my senses attuned to listening, hearing every sound with heart and soul, for the likelihood of someone bursting unannounced into the room at any moment is high, and the tribulation begins from the very moment I am caught sitting by the window.

A girl does not sit behind the window,

a girl must not look outside,

a girl should not be so shameless, and a girl must not...

She entered the room once more, and I recognized her by her heavy footsteps and the way she tears into the earth as she comes inside, as though with every stride she means to drag the ground in her wake and overturn everything upon it. For anyone who has listened to her walk a few times, recognizing her footsteps is easy, and for me, who has rehearsed these footsteps throughout my entire life, it is easier still.

Before she reaches inside the room, I must rearrange myself into another posture.

I must review the red lines in advance:

A girl does not recline, and even if she does, she does not lie flat upon the floor on her back.

A girl does not sit behind the window and gaze outside.

The curtains of a girl's room window are always drawn, and to be certain, a multi-layered curtain must cover the windows entirely.

A girl does not study excessively either—what use is this? These studies lead us nowhere; we must learn the lesson of

life and strive for living. Yet whatever else it may be, reading books carries fewer perils. Therefore, the moment I hear the sound of her footfall, I must make my way to the spot I prepared for myself some time ago:

That small writing desk and that study lamp—how dearly I love them. Both were bought for me by Father. With what eagerness and excitement I ran down to the courtyard to bring them up, forgetting to put on my chador. Father could not afford to buy anything; a man who labored all day, toiling through cold and heat, could not afford such luxury items. Yet he had heard my weeping, had seen how I mourned out of a longing to possess this writing desk. So even though he carried others' burdens on his back and bore every hardship upon his soul, he remembered me on that day, brought it along, and traced a new world for me—a world filled with fresh aspirations, reading and writing at a small desk with a lamp illuminating my notebooks and books. I could no longer remain frozen in my place; I wanted to help Father carry the load several times over. He had wrung this heavy burden from the very essence of his exhausting labor, and it would be unfair for him to carry the entire load alone and haul it up the stairs.

Mother's incessant shouting called me back to myself, and all the sweetness of possessing that writing desk and study lamp remained lodged in my heart.

Only the whores come into the courtyard like that—and a courtyard overlooked by the balconies of other neighbors, where any of them can witness this promiscuity. Mother's constant nagging that this girl is promiscuous at heart and delights in such actions, and that no matter what we do with her, we will reap nothing beyond her true nature. Yet right now, the best place for me and for confronting that woman is right here at this writing desk, holding my books and reading them so she can approach me, enter the room, and do whatever she pleases.

What is it that she truly wants from the heart of this room? What is it that has made this room so fascinating to her? What valuable thing has she searched for in this room all this time, that tempts her to enter it yet again?

Time and again I have retraced her steps through this room, yet I have found nothing. And now once more, striking the earth with her footsteps as she always does and striding forward with bowed head and knitted brows, she enters the room. Without a moment's pause and according to her ancient custom and habit, she must strike a blow at me: "Aren't you dead yet, shutting yourself up in this room like this? Spend at least a fraction of your time with us and pay us some mind."

Then she rushed swiftly toward the quilt and mattress closet, thrusting her head inside. Yet I saw her neither take anything out nor put anything in; she merely poked her head in and

after a moment emerged from the room once more. As she moved away, she called out in a voice bordering on a shout: "Come and cook some food; that wretched father and brother of yours will be arriving before long."

Why does she lump the name of that grief-stricken father together with that worthless lout brother? He is hardly wretched; it is clear what he is prowling around for right now. Has he found yet another young girl to chat up, or is he, according to his usual habit, roaming the end of the alley swaggering with his friends, who are even more dissolute than himself?

For some time now I have not been able to see him from the room's window, but in days past I kept all his movements under surveillance through the pane. After all, their primary hangout was just a few paces away right beneath Pooneh's window. He would come, raise his voice, roar with his friends, horse around, and then, upon Pooneh appearing behind her window, he would shove one of his friends this way and that to show off his physique—and poor Pooneh, how spellbound she would become by this by this cardboard bully of the streets!!

Yet for a long time now he has relocated those few paces away with those dissolute friends. I can only catch sight of him from the top of the unfinished rooftop. On the few occasions I saw him, he performed the exact same repetitive behaviors of the past: bullying once again, shouting, picking

fights with everyone, and then, after this eventful excursion, coming home at whatever hour he pleased to boast to Mother of his masterpieces, leaving her to revel in having such a son and crying out once more to his eyes, his lips, and his mind: If only I had given birth to a son instead of you, so I would never have been reduced to the promiscuous!

Dinner must be cooked; food must be prepared for him so that tomorrow he can roar even better and louder. This great pride of the family must be proclaimed to other neighborhoods as well, so everyone may learn a lesson from seeing him and know what a masterly loudmouth the eldest child of Mahboub Khatoun is. I must satiate him with delicious meals, I must feed him...

Yet that old man eats that very same food too. Well, if I do not cook for him, he will be greeted with nothing more than an egg courtesy of Mahboub Khatoun.

What else has he eaten besides eggs all these years? All his toil and burden-bearing was for my sake, and all the weight of his reproaches has fallen upon my head. What has any of this to do with the great Mahboub Khatoun, who is the sole ruler and single savior of our family? If she never once satiated him, it is of no consequence; the only prevailing value is that she has granted life to that madman. She has hoarded all his earnings so that she could build a house, so that she could have a roof over her head today. If he did not live, if he never understood how his entire life slipped away,

if throughout all these years he never once brought a decent meal to his lips, none of it matters, because Mahboub Khatoun is the supreme manager of this lineage.
I must be in the kitchen; I must carry out all chores in the best possible manner. She demanded dinner preparations from me, and I must cook dinner, clean the kitchen, dust, sweep, and wash and scrub everything in sight, for this was her final warning. To transgress it will give birth to yet another endless war.
Mahboub Khatoun advances and reduces everything in her path to dust; she flattens anyone who dares oppose her, flaunting her power and majesty to all. Everyone falls to the dust before her with nothing to say, for her power of speech, her power of knowing, and everything about her is far beyond and loftier than all others.
I must magnify whatever she said to an infinite degree and finish it, for a fierce war lies in ambush. The onset of these insinuations heralds a bitter battle whose ultimate end will surely be branded as my own promiscuity.
Yet what was it that the old man liked best to eat? What stew did he favor? Ah, alongside his meal he always loves to eat mast-o-khiar. But we have run out of cucumbers in the house. What if I were to go outside to buy cucumbers? Mahboub has just fallen resting; not a sound comes from her at this moment, and who knows into which hole she has hidden herself?

Are you looking for trouble?
Are you wishing to spark a brand-new war?
Now that darkness has fallen, does a girl have the right to step outside the house?
Can a lone girl be sent out for purchases, and at this hour of the night at that?
Woe upon us! Alas, the world has turned into a world of the promiscuous; this universe drives us toward promiscuity and depravity.
It is better for the old man to abstain from mast-o-khiar today; perhaps I shall prepare it for him on another occasion.
Where do you suppose she is right now?
Has she, as usual, slumped back into that state, leaving all her paraphernalia for sleep abandoned so as to turn the house into a house of ghosts, extinguishing every lamp so that we might sit in the graveyard while not a sound stirs from anywhere because she is tired and weary?
She went out shopping today, and this outing must surely have worn her down and silenced her, surely broken her spirit, so today she undoubtedly needs rest more than on other days. If she is in that state, she is certainly asleep, but if she has retreated to their room, she is without a doubt talking on the phone.
Prying and searching for her is also terrifying, for if she sees, she will interpret everything as frivolous feminine playfulness.

A dignified, poised woman must stand motionlessly in a corner, solemnly bringing to completion whatever has been demanded of her—meaning that right now I must surrender all five of my senses entirely to cooking, and nothing else, for even these acts might ultimately be construed as promiscuity.

Yet whatever they weave and invent for her, it matters not at all to me to know what state that dignified, poised woman is in right now or what she is doing. Turning over that entire state would not take a few seconds of time, and the room whose door she has closed, clinging to that same mood absorbed on the far side of the kitchen, requires no great effort either; yet inside the room where the lights are out, I hear Mahboub's whispering. She speaks softly, quietly; she has turned off the lights, and I imagine she is now sprawled across the telephone.

Her back bent over the telephone, with the instrument close to her gathered legs—that is her familiar image while in conversation. But this quiet, broken voice will bring me no closer to anything; I must press my ear to the door, I must draw closer to that partition standing between us. The circle of those who converse with her is exceedingly small; one can dare attribute this circle to one of the aunts—that dignified, poised sister, that goddess and center of the universe, that omniscient woman, that goddess of purity and splendor.

I know that state has seated itself in conversation with her as well; I am certain she is speaking with her again, for she alone is the one who calms Mahboub to such a degree, and only before her does Mahboub gather her limbs so, speaking softly and with a stutter. Yes, she has taken her seat within the circle of this existence, and one of these lines entangled within the radius of such a circle belongs to Mahboub.
It is this disciple before that master who casts her gaze downward thus, listening more so that she might comprehend more, so that she might know more and draw profit from the reservoir of secrets belonging to that accomplished woman. Yet amidst her words, amidst this silence, a few words from that dignified, poised woman made my body tremble, brought a cold sweat to my brow, and brought my very soul to my lips. The repetition of these agonizing words has dealt me pain, cutting deep into my soul:
Genitalia, phallus.
The rhythm of these two words, which I hesitated to track down, caused me pain as well. I did not know which one it was, but I heard it from Mahboub's tongue as she uttered one of them and cast it forth, and not long after speaking it, she burst into tears. The sound of her weeping was enough to deafen even the heavens; *it no longer suits you*, she moaned in torment. I do not know what that omniscient old woman on the other side of the line had to say, but tracing

Mahboub's face was simple for me—that face which is now cracked and broken with countless wrinkles, abandoned to itself; those tears that have brought a tiny drop of water to this barren, waterless desert to wash away this dryness; and those knitted brows that have now fallen still in the pain of her tears, having banished that habitual image of violence.
I could no longer linger beside that door; I could no longer breathe that air for even a single second longer, and I had to distance myself from that darkhouse, I had to carry myself out into the open air. Whatever they wished to say henceforth, whatever they wished to do—the strength to swallow that putrid air in that damp darkhouse no longer remained in my soul. I had to go to the unfinished rooftop, where two sympathetic companions awaited me, where they would welcome me and peck gently at my soul with their small, painless beaks.
Oh, my little yellow ones, oh, my golden-faced moons, tell me: do you too languish in these same pains? Do you too deem others promiscuous? Have you too become girls and seen this vast distance carved into your middles? Surely you two little beauties do not belong to two genders, beating against each other's heads in this war? Yet you softly embrace one another, though into your hearts has crept none of these things that we have come to know.

When you press your broad beaks against my fingers and seek to become a fraction of my soul, you have penetrated deep within me.
Would that the world were a world devoid of genitalia!
Would that bodies held no room for this ugly phallus that drives us apart from one another!
Would that I had never been a child, and never…
How did she come to know what genitalia is? Who acquainted her with this phallus and genitalia? What did she know of this body left upon her? Who had shared this with her, leading her at such an age and amidst her childhood into that vault? Why did she expose her genitalia? What stories had been woven for her that she thought exposing her genitalia was of such great and lofty value for a growing, exalted girl?
Has that screaming boy in the streets—whom I can now spot a little ways away from this air, down on the ground among his ruffian friends—ever exposed his genitalia?
Has he ever displayed his phallus to another?
What is this tiny fragment of human bodies that has caused their world to tremble?
What is this forsaken body dragging itself across their corpses that brings me to a cold sweat and Mahboub to tears?
How did that boy in the distance know that by displaying his genitalia he would set my world on fire?

Who taught him that this exhibition of the phallus would cast fire upon lives?
Did someone display their genitalia to Mahboub as well? By right of those bygone days, ought I not to call her to account? Ought I not strip her of her chastity and innocence? Ought I not scream down upon her? Ought I not label her a *herzeh*? Ought I not refuse to look even into her eyes because of this stigma?
Yet perhaps she has read all these things of her own accord—that someone once revealed his phallus to her, and a woman must not look, for by looking she too becomes impure. Oh, shame upon all who are called women! Oh, curse upon these womannesses, all born of *herzegis* and turning everyone into *herzehs*!
My little duck, do you too exhibit your genitalia? Do you show your genitalia to one another? And if you have, is the one who saw unwittingly, the one who unknowingly stumbled into this marsh, branded impure and a *herzeh*? Do you feel shame for having such a child?
Do you cast her away because she saw something she knew not what it was, while someone lured her with a thousand promises to those distant airs?
Do you nevermore deem her pure, seeing that purity lies hidden within your bodies, your gazes, and the veils draped over your limbs?

Would that there were a fragment of a place in your world that summoned me to itself, that drew me close so I might remember none of these people anymore, carry none of them with me, and drive them all far from my presence!

Why should I weep, and why must I wail and lament? Why has Mahboub retreated to her room to weep? Has she too grown unchaste and impure because some madman exposed his genitalia to her? Does she weep for her own impurity? Or no—she who can never grow impure, she and that older sister of hers who are the very fountainhead of all purity in the world? Perhaps she has remembered my ignominious past; perhaps she has remembered how a seven-year-old girl gazed upon the genitalia of a twelve-year-old boy, and all the purity of her body was plundered from her, and she is the *herzeh* who has lived alongside her all these years. Has she remembered this stain upon her forehead?

Does she call to mind once more how they left that neighborhood behind to flee this brand and this shame, to cast far from themselves this ruinous disgrace that their seven-year-old daughter had seen genitalia—had seen a fragment of another's body—yet never once asked why that mad child had shown his genitalia to me? They beat her savagely as well; her father, upon coming to know of it, tore madly at her soul and made her understand that this portion of human limbs is a particle of shame, a fragment that must be hidden in secrecy, spoken of not at all, heard of not at all.

Without a single memory or recollection of these people, without a glance toward their world, I long to gather you quietly into my arms, oh my little yellow duck, and—free of *herzegi*—sleep peacefully unto the world left behind by these people, amidst their genitalia and phallus-exhibitions that have branded everyone *herzeh* all at once. Perhaps in sleep I shall reach a world farther than these people and carve upon it a new pattern, far removed from their pain-wracked world.

CHAPTER 2

Who has seen me in that state of mind, in that atmosphere? Could someone have been around and understood what became of me? Was there anyone nearby who realized what has befallen us? What fault of mine could possibly have been committed that gave that wretch the audacity to do such a thing right before my eyes?

Woe is me! What am I to do now with this disgrace? What strength remains within me to hold my head high before others and look them in the eye? What is this thing called being a woman that has gripped me so relentlessly by the throat?

All these agonies begin from the very fact that we have not brought upright men into the world. If only I were a man in this world, and then I could answer these demon-natured wretches just as they deserve!

If only for a brief moment my place could be exchanged with that spineless, potato-like man! If only for a few moments I could sit in the stature of a man so that I might do what I had in mind! But what could I do in that moment? When that shameless wretch exposed his genitalia to me, what did I have in my power to do?

If only my eyes had been blind and had nothing before them to see! I, who could not cry out in that state, who could not put that shameless wretch back in his place—if I had cried out, if I had exposed him before everyone, whose honor would have been placed in jeopardy? Whose chastity and purity would have been lost? What would others have thought of me? Would they not have asked themselves why this shameless wretch, out of this countless spectrum of women, chose me and exposed himself before me?

Would they not have said that certainly this woman, too, did something and provoked the man into this act? Would this mob not have agreed that the root of all these tribulations springs from the hearts of women? Is it not so that women have ever wrought turmoil in the world? Is it not so that women have cast the sparks of fire toward men? Is it not so

that women have led men astray and forged from them men far removed from all beliefs?

If I had cried out in that state and atmosphere, would I have become disgraced before friend and stranger, or that shameless man?

If only I possessed a fraction of manhood within myself to put him in his place! From that spineless, potato-like man no warmth will ever rise, but I can raise my eldest son in such a way that he tears up the roots of these madmen, stands with a broad chest before these shameless ones, and answers their hideous natures. But can I speak to him now about what has passed over me? Will my son not think ill of me? Will his honor and dignity not be dragged through blood and dirt? If I were to tell him and he flew into a rage, wanting to tear his collar and rush forward, what would he be able to say in the face of that shameless one? What would he have to say? He would have to shout, "You exposed your genitalia to my mother!" But what would others say about her? What thoughts would they have regarding her? Without ever having seen me, they would all unanimously pass a verdict on my impurity; they all would accuse him of having a loose and dissolute mother.

Where has the root of these tribulations sprung from? Where has this hideous nature come from? Could it be that I committed some ugliness that made him convince himself he could do whatever he pleased in front of me?

If only the earth would open its mouth and swallow me whole! If only I could dig into the earth with the power of my footsteps and settle deep within it so that there would be no more others to gaze upon me!

What do these mortals think of me? This very madman who goes about selling his moldy greens—what thoughts does he harbor about me? Does he know what has become of me? Does he know that today, in the bus along the way, a man exposed his genitalia to me? Out of all the women present in that bus, he came only toward me and chose me among them, and then did that which burned my soul and my very universe.

Ah yes, everyone has understood this! Everyone in this neighborhood, too, knows what has befallen me. If they did not know, for what reason did they gaze at me thus? Why was it that they tracked my walking? Every time I turned back, I saw their lingering gazes, and all along the path I felt the pursuit of their eyes upon my very soul. They surely know everything; they surely know what has happened to me.

Yet in that cursed bus, no one saw me. There was no acquaintance present, and secondly, in that moment when the shameless wretch did that deed, no one witnessed the scene. I saw it and my soul burned, yet I uttered not a word. I turned everything to ash within my own being; I bore all the fire within my life, and while I was burning from the agony of

the flame, I did not even let out a single breath. But these people have found out; these people know that today I have lost my chastity, that my purity has perished. These people know in what quagmire I remain sunken! If they did not know, they would not track me with their gazes this way, nor follow my footsteps the whole length of the road.

Did you see how that good-for-nothing wretch said with that grating voice of his: "Mahboub Khatoun, is there anything you need?"

He knew what had befallen me, and now he wants to draw close to me; he wants to forge a relationship with me through this means. Yes, they think I have become a whore; perhaps they have mistook me for fallen women.

Oh, heaven forbid! What if they have touched me in their hearts as well? What if in their thoughts they have violated me? When that shameless wretch exposed his genitalia before me, had he touched me in his heart? Did he size me up all that while and build a dream within himself in which I had become his concubine?

If only the earth would open up right here near the house and swallow me whole! Ah, how I loathe the voice of this neighbor woman.

"How are you, Mahboub Khatoun?"

What airs she puts on in her voice! What a face she has crafted for herself—with those green eyes of hers, with her reddened lips! With the help of tweezers, how she has

plucked and narrowed her brows! I am certain she has sat before the mirror for hours to fashion such a face for herself, and now she calls out to me with all those coquetries and affectations.

What things have been done for her! When she goes outside, how men show her their genitalia! But she—she is a whore; she takes pleasure in seeing them. I am certain that in her mind she even compares their genitalia to her husband's genitalia.

I detest her coquettish voice. That brazen whore was brought into the world solely for such promiscuity. She thinks I am as mindless as she is. When she sees my spineless potato of a husband, what flirtations she sets in motion for him! How she utters her voice with even greater coyness! That one time—I think I have not forgotten it—I remember how she bared the cleavage of her breasts to our Agha Saeed from beneath her chador. But she does not know that our Saeed is far too much of a potato to ever respond to her coquetries.

What if this whore has sharpened her teeth for my son?

What if she has hatched a plan for him in her mind as well?

She feels no shame, neither for her age nor for that wretched husband of hers who labors from dawn till dusk just to feed these people.

When she says, "How are you, Mahboub Khatoun?", I would love to reply instead of "By your grace," by saying, "What business is it of yours, you harlot of a woman?"

I must answer her precisely like that! I must warn my son to keep his distance from her; this woman is a demon. This woman, a whore, has stepped onto the earth to seduce everyone.

Ah, how I long for this dark house! I would love to spread my bedding right in the middle of the hall and close my eyes, to sleep so long that nothing of the past ever comes to my mind again, to forget everything. I would love to drown in sleep and step outside the house no more.

What is that harlot of a daughter doing in the house right now? Perhaps it was because of her that the men dared to expose themselves to me. Yes, that is it; in a house where whores reside, such behavior will follow. Now she has shut herself up in her room again, but I know what passes through her corrupt mind. She entertains nothing in her mind save these idle words. If I give her even an inch of leeway, tomorrow she will become just like that neighbor woman—she will tear open her bosom and sell her body to men.

I do not know what she is searching for among these books. What on earth is her purpose in reading this book and these notebooks? One day I must get to the bottom of her affairs and find out what is written within the hearts of those books that this madwoman is so captivated by them. Could she be in communication with some boy? Could she have written a letter to a boy, or perhaps a boy has written a letter to her

and she is reading them now? But these comings and goings yield me nothing; every time I go to her room without catching hold of anything, I must return and sit back down in my place.

If only instead of these things she gave a shred of thought to her home and family! The only thing that has no meaning for her is this very family. And rightly so—whoppers understand nothing of a family; they have not come to earth to have a family. They have come to drown themselves in their whoredom. They do not know what the meaning of mother, brother, and father is, and that is precisely why she never even once remembers us. If I leave her be, she sits in her room all day and is unwilling to be near us except to go to the toilet. But I must whip her into shape!

I must bring her to her senses; I must make her obedient to living; I must fashion a human being out of her who is worthy of having a family. Every single time, something must be pointed out to her. Every now and then I sit and ponder whether she possesses even a shred of reason. How is it possible that she never once thinks of preparing food and cleaning the house? But I quickly correct myself: she does have enough reason, but whores simply do not care about such matters.

For instance, when have you ever seen the neighbor woman busy making tomato paste? When have you seen her put up pickles and cook jam? She thinks only of her own styling and

posturing, just to split her bosom further and capture the hearts of mad men.

Not even once has she brought her eyes to her tongue in response to my request. If only you had a shred of chastity in your heart! If only I had given birth to a stone instead of you, rather than such a source of public disgrace! Not once does she submit to what is said, and every time, more insolent than the last, with a rebellious neck she does precisely what she has hatched in her own head.

Every time, I must remind her of those same repetitive words, only for her to do the exact same thing again with a thousand shortcomings and in the worst possible way. Not once has she ever thought of her family, nor will she ever; her sole preoccupations are those very things that the neighbor woman harbors in her mind—buying new cosmetics, defiling her face and head to display them to men. What are all these airs and graces for? What else are they defiling themselves like this for, if not for whoredom?

Oh, goodness, my soul catches fire when I think that this stubborn girl has gone and bought herself panties! And not even ordinary panties, but string ones contrived to cover her body—just so someone might see them and what might come over her upon seeing them!

If only that time I saw that underwear upon her body, I had not torn it from her and pulled it off like that! If only that time I had burned her skin and left her branded so she might

know what these shamelessness behaviors bring upon a person! What do you defile your own body for, that what might fall to your share? You make yourself a whore so that what may be gained?

Woe is upon me that I have nurtured such a daughter! If only I had reflected more upon raising her; if only I had spent more time, and if only I would not have allowed her to see every Tom, Dick, and Harry in life!

This very neighbor woman herself is the worst of teachers, but of such ones we have no shortage around us—these very girls and her classmates, indeed these very girls in the streets who have turned themselves into whores so as to put themselves up for auction to others! Or those filthy paternal cousin girls of hers, they too have taught her not a little.

If only I had exercised more prudence in her upbringing! If only I would not have allowed her to converse with those brazen ones; if only I would not have allowed her to sit and rise with them, so that in the end she would not put on string panties for me and thus transform herself into the whores!

All my misfortune has sprung from the existence of this very girl. If such a calamity has befallen my head today, if today they exposed themselves thus, surely it is from having this wayward daughter. Perhaps this is my punishment in the world so that God may make me understand that you were not diligent in training your child, that you have become the same color as the host of whores, and you must direct your

attention more to her instruction. Perhaps these are from the pain of this very wretchedness.

The path of my throat has grown narrow, and I cannot sleep. I cannot find peace in a corner and keep my attention away from what has passed over me. If I lie down thus and continue, perhaps I shall perish from shortness of breath; or I must take refuge in that flood of sleeping pills and bring this calamity to an end in this way—which shall be with me again after waking—or I must speak with someone, I must empty myself and share this pain with another. Perhaps it would lessen my grief and sorrow; perhaps it would grant me a shred of solace.

"Sister dear, what are you doing?"

"Nothing, we are praying for you. I got into a back-and-forth with this Susan again; she has left no patience or stamina for me anymore."

"Why, what has she done again, sister of my soul?"

"Nothing. Today when I was returning home from the beauty parlor, I was by the window and saw she had removed the chador from her head and was walking lazily toward the house."

"I say, you unreasonable woman, what sort of face is this you have crafted for yourself? Why haven't you put your chador on?"

"She says, 'Nothing, mother dear, I got ready for the party of so-and-so's jackass, and I had no patience to put a chador on.'"

"I say, woman without reason, we have honor among the neighbors! Will they not say how loose and dissolute so-and-so's daughter-in-law is? What will they say behind our backs tomorrow?"

"After a great deal of bickering, she finally raises her voice to the top of her head and says, 'I like it; I no longer wish to wear a chador!'"

"And what did you do, sister? You passed by her side so simply? If you give these ones leeway, tomorrow they will demand the lining too!"

"No, sister mine, how so simply? Let her husband come home tonight; I have fashioned a plan for him that he will not forget until the end of his life! She will receive such a thorough beating that from now on, upon hearing the name of the chador, she will recall today's memory. Forget these things, sister dear; tell me about yourself—what has happened that you remembered me?"

"Nothing, dearest of my heart. My heart was heavy, and I wanted to speak with someone, and I saw that I have no comforting stone save you."

"Tell me, my life, what has happened? Why is your heart heavy? Has that little girl made trouble again?"

"Sister, do not lay hand upon my heart, for it is bleeding! I know not what to do with her; I know not what must be done to bring her to her senses."
"I have told you several times, your words alone are not the solution-bringer; Agha Saeed must also lend a hand a little bit."
"Oh, sister of mine, you know Saeed; he is a spineless, inert potato of a man! How am I to make him lend a hand? At all, for him these matters are not subjects worthy of display."
"My sister, there is a way; you must bring him to the garden, you must make the matter seem important to him. It cannot just be like this! Now, what has she done that you are so shaken again?"
"Nothing, sister dear, all day my mind is fixed upon it. I think of the deeds she has done thus far; I recall the past and my entire being catches fire. What kind of destiny was this that we had? What kind of unchastity and lack of modesty seized our hem? How did this girl set our world on fire?"
"Sister dear, how am I to tell you, of what am I to speak to you, from which part of this story shall I begin to speak? If I tell you what has befallen me today, what will you think of me? Will your judgment of me not change? Will you not deem me a whore? If you knew that someone had dared to expose his genitalia to your sister, would you still look at me the way you looked at me from the past?"

"How shall I speak of my pain? How shall I speak of how my soul caught fire again today, how I burned anew? How shall I speak of what has come over my universe? How shall I speak of how they have made me unchaste? I must speak with someone and deliver myself a little from this onslaught, but I have no strength to tell my truth!"

"Yes, and right it is too! If I must tell you, I must speak of the instigator of this ill event—of that girl who at the age of seven cast this stain upon our hem, and now we burn in this wasteland. I must speak to you of her, who is the cause of all our miseries! You who are aware of my past, you who know how I was before marriage, you who know I never prepared myself for display to others, you who know with what utter purity I preserved my entire soul and body, and my very existence was received by Saeed alone—and even that, I reluctantly placed my existence at his disposal!"

"You who know how I lived with purity of body, how I guarded the purity of my skin, who dared to show genitalia to me?"

Sister, you who know all these things, and if you now know what has befallen me, will my past purity still have the same hue and fragrance for you?

So I will tell you yet again; I speak of the root of this pain and of that event which brought our world to this pass. I speak and I weep; I weep for my entire world, weeping until the tears flowing from my eyes cleanse and purify my body and

return me once more to my former station. Yet, sister, grant me the right not to tell you the truth of the matter, lest your gaze toward me change as well.

To speak with you brings me a shred of peace—these tears shed, these words spoken, these sympathies, and the extent to which you deem me in the right. That you, too, believe as I do that the root of all evils in our world is precisely this promiscuity; that one must stand against this promiscuity; that you aid me in the thought that if we have fallen into retribution, it stems precisely from these accusations of harlotry. That when I speak with you, I glean fresh ideas; that I grow firmer in my thoughts and know all the more that my beliefs possess a proof within themselves, and I have taken all this proof from your very being.

Sister dear, speaking with you calms my entire being, and how good it is that every now and then I can commune with you and share my pains with you, and that you give me the right paths so that I may rise to my feet once more.

Now my breath has returned to its place. An hour of speaking with that wise sister who knows of everything—she who is the symbol of living purely upon the world—calms me. That one and only son must be received; one must give him wings and feathers thus, must keep him far from the evil of these corrupt ones. From that neighbor woman—they are not just one; thousands of them have filled every nook and cranny of this neighborhood. That good-for-nothing Pooneh!

She thinks I do not know how she would come behind the window and how, with her coquetries, she wanted to lead my son astray. She thinks I do not know how she had hatched plots for this eldest son of mine to cast him into the snare of her temptation!

They think I know nothing of their world. They have thought within themselves that I do not know what these whores are plotting! How I placed her right into her own hands—there, where with eyes fixed upon me she said imploringly, "My desire is to become your bride!" I settled accounts with her properly and gave her answer for her promiscuities, that with this instigation of turmoil she cannot take my eldest son away from me!

Whores surrender their flesh and body, advancing with the vain illusion that they can snare men with this temptation. But I—I shall not let a whore become my daughter-in-law! A girl who has yielded herself to the embrace of a boy is a whore, and she is not worthy of life with a complete man like my Amir. He must have a wife as pure as a rose petal, unreachable and far away—not a corrupt girl who has sold her soul to promiscuity. How I severed her foot from my son’s life! How I threatened her that if she continued, I would tell everything to her family! I would make her surrendered body a topic of discussion with everyone—how I drove this whore away from my son's life!

As for my daughter, she is not like this; she is a bit scatterbrained, and one can rein her in and forge a chaste woman out of her. I merely need to keep my attention fixed upon her and not let her make a single misstep.
Why is she not in the house? Why has she not stayed in the kitchen? Why is she not cooking? What is she up to yet again? Where has she drifted off to anew, and how has she abandoned herself to scatterbrained ways? One cannot be heedless of her even for a single second! I must search the entire house for her; I must hunt for her everywhere. What if she has gone out of the house? What if she has an appointment with one of the neighborhood boys? Ya Hazrat-e Abbas, what if she is engaged in some other deed? Lord, help me yourself! Guard her from the evil of this promiscuity!
All the responsibility of this family rests upon my shoulders; from that potato of a man nothing whatsoever arises. They have left every task to me, and I had to discipline her.
Is the rooftop a place for a lone girl? An unfinished rooftop that is exposed to view from all sides? Does a lone girl go to the rooftop, and that too without sufficient clothing? What if someone had seen her in this state? What if they had seen her feet—oh, heaven forbid, what if they had seen her hair? How could we ever have held our heads high in this neighborhood again?

I told her to cook, and she went up to the rooftop! Scatterbrained ways and neglectfulness I can put out of my mind, but harlotry—never! If you were not going to do this deed, you could at least have gone to your very grave and your room! Do you want to bring our honor to ruin? Do you want to mark us out for friend and stranger alike? Do you want to leave nothing remaining of our status?

A deed that Saeed never does, I had to do myself! Was it not that my sister said so? Was it not that...?

I had to discipline her in retribution for this madness. Now she weeps a little bit, and the blisters and marks of those blows will also fade into oblivion, but she will always remember that the rooftop is not a place for a lone girl, and that too in those clothes and in that posture! Every time she hears the name of the rooftop, this day's memory will be evoked for her, and she will know that this deed is among the forbidden acts in this house.

The task that fell upon Saeed's shoulders was done by me, and I am content with this deed. There is no further need for her brother, but if she stretches her tongue too far, I can also remind him so that he settles accounts with her once more. But for now she is silent; for now she has nothing to say, and she can be kept in this very silence. If she does something again, this time I shall tell her brother.

I must cook some food; no warmth is ever generated for us by this little girl. I reckon eggs will make a fine meal; Saeed is

accustomed to this food as well and enjoys it. Secondly, with all these preoccupations and all these thoughts, I cannot prepare anything else. I have a mountain of thoughts to ponder and must attend to them; I must adopt better paths and arrive at better solutions, so this very egg is quite enough for them.

If she constantly laments, if the sound of her moaning reaches me still, it was her due; I had to punish her for this sin, I had to make her understand that this is a grave blunder, I had to deter her from this deed and preserve our honor. Why should I think that I acted thus toward her because of my frayed nerves? Why should I harbor a pang of conscience? Why should I go to her to make amends? No, this was her right; this punishment of ours has sprung from her world. I must not entangle myself in such thoughts.

What if her head has been bloodied? From those blows I struck, did some mishap not befall her? Is her body bruised? Has she endured immense pain? Once more this compassionate, gentle heart of mine has stood in the way of her proper instruction! I must think that this method of my teaching is for her own better life. I want her not to be like the whores; I want her to be purer than a flower in this world and to shine for us as long as the world exists.

These things are for her sake, and I must think of nothing else. At present, I must think of frying the eggs that will fill my only son's belly. Tomorrow I must cook a better meal for

him; this very promise I shall make to myself right now, to consider a finer meal for him tomorrow.

CHAPTER 3

This home-destroying pain sweeps through my entire soul and presses onward—what manner of agony is this that I must wrestle with from time to time? Blood and ritual impurity have engulfed my whole being.

When this pain seeps into my soul, I remember the past more than ever before. The onslaught of these memories is more suffocating than the agonizing pain that accompanies me; yes, memories wound my entire soul. I remember the day Mahboub Khatoun and I went to a gathering at the mosque, and that day, and that bulky woman who had buried herself inside a chador.

"Hear me, O people! We are all women here, and there are no men among us, no trace of those lechers and phallus-worshipers to see us and be stirred by the sight. Yet this demonic body of ours as women, which follows us endlessly—how can we remain at ease from the shadow of this entity? If by some twist of fate a man should suddenly enter, what must be done?"

Precisely the solution of the bulky woman: that same woman whose preachings make everyone reflective. She is the most learned of all ages; she is the one who has studied jurisprudence and knows the pillars of religion better than we do. When she says that this lack of hijab and failure to observe the lawful veil sets fire to the hearts of families, she is right. Whatever else may be, she has read and known more in this regard than we have.

Perhaps she possesses a special proximity to the Almighty God, perhaps the commands of the Lord of the Worlds are sent directly to her. Whatever the case, she knows better than we do, and so, with piety, she has buried herself inside a chador lest a man should enter and behold her in a disheveled and unkempt state—for instance, upon seeing her flowing hair (which I have seen once, and most of it has fallen out), he might lose his restraint and desire to commit an improper act, or even harbor a great sin in his mind and heart. This wise and sensible woman knows better than we do how those locks must be kept hidden from the eyes of

lustful men, so that neither she nor others fall into the abyss of sin and transgression.

In truth, how formidable is this body in its capacity to drive men toward promiscuity, how many fires will it ignite in the world, and into what abominations will it cast the community of God? We must shroud whatever pertains to these bodies and withhold them, lest men fall into sin or we ourselves, by exposing our forms, plunge into the state of a whore.

Oh, woe! Once again that familiar word clings to my soul, once more reading the name of whore and promiscuity, which will never detach itself even a fraction from the lives of us women. But what of men? From what word do they shrink in terror? Do they too drag such vocabulary in their wake? Yes, surely they are whores as well, and more than that, lechers. They too remain afflicted by the mire of ugliness, and most mortals are trapped within this well. But why were we created thus—creatures so deeply ensnared in the coils of lust, possessing men so greedy and lecherous, and women who at the slightest touch tumble into the domain of the whore?

What would happen if a fraction of our body remained uncovered?

If they saw our hair, or God forbid, our flesh—for instance, if our thighs were exposed—what would come of it? Would not the throne of the Divine shudder? Would not fire and tumult

erupt? What would befall this community of God, what would they do, and what destiny would await them?
The memory of the words spoken by that bulky woman—that even if she were to walk naked and bare among men, no one would cast a glance at her—never leaves my existence for a moment.
Thus she spoke:
"If you loosen your hair for men and incite them to this sin, on a distant tomorrow in the hereafter and the Day of Judgment, you shall be suspended by those very loose tresses. Scorching fire and molten lead shall settle upon your souls; you shall remain hanging by your breasts."
What turmoils will these dangling breasts of women unleash? Naturally, on the morrow of the Lordship, He must sit upon His throne and suspend women by those very breasts.
Yet did they not feed infants with those very breasts, and what lies hidden within them that upon their exposure both men are stirred to tumult and women are summoned to whoredom, until in an afterlife—close and distant to all our lives—we shall shriek while suspended from them?
Yet that bulky woman knew much of the hereafter and our world; she had spent her entire life reading and knowing of these matters, she had dedicated her entire life to divine knowledge, and inevitably she knew more than we did. Yet her visage never departs my mind—with that large nose and

the mole beside it, with her corpulent, sagging posture, with her sparse, fallen hair.

For a time, I imagined her bare. Every time I saw her, every time she took her seat upon the chair at the head of the assembly and spoke of the afterlife, of the hanging breasts, every time she discoursed upon hell, upon the veil, safety, and the pearl hidden within the oyster shell, I visualized her naked before me.

I pictured her calloused physique, her sagging belly that truly reached down to her pubic region, her hanging breasts descending to her stomach, her fallen hair and disfigured face. She wove it for me to such a degree, she spoke to me so much of women remaining bare and naked, she recounted so much of severed breasts dangling toward the heavens, she spoke so much of women's loose hair and the tumult wrought in the divine order, that I went mad, and nothing remained before me save her naked form.

Every time I imagined her in her naked form before me on the city streets, I said to myself:

If she were to walk into the street thus naked, would any man look at her?

Would a man even commit a sin in his mind?

Would he do something with her naked body, if only in his fantasies?

The lingering chime of her voice would not release me for an instant, not leaving me for a second, and I would recite that

lingering sound over and over. How calmly and deliberately she uttered her words; this deliberate cadence and the repetition of past words and sentences made her speech linger in my mind for a long time. Every time I remembered her words, I would recite them over and over:

Is anyone among you menstruating?

Oh, woe! This menstrual pain has sapped my strength—once again the persistent, chronic pains in my lower abdomen, once again the bleeding and our becoming ritually impure. May no one be menstruating among you, lest the sacred precinct of the mosque be rendered ritually impure.

I have become ritually impure once again; once again they called me filthy and a whore.

O Lord, what sort of creation was this that we should become ritually impure thus, time and time again every month, that for days they should consider us ritually impure and bar us from Your house?

She spoke and recounted tales of our being designated as sources of ritual impurity, yet I came to Your house many times with that very impure body. I came to speak with You, to say: This impurity is Your creation; You have become the creator and proclaimer of these impurities.

I came to say that we knew nothing of lust, yet back in childhood, in the quiet of her tales, you recounted it to us when they would not let us engage in our childish play, laying bare the secret of lust before our eyes. O Lord, they

readied themselves for us and said that boys belong to a world apart from ours, that they gaze upon our bodies. But, O Master of the universe, they knew nothing of our souls; they were of our age as children. The unbraided hair upon our heads did not incite them; our thighs were like their own thighs. Yet suddenly they came and pulled us apart from one another, and after a while they drew a chador over our faces so that those boys might not know what had grown beneath those long black cloths, what existed there, and every time they lay in wait with sharper teeth.

We were the very same playmates of childhood days, when we knew nothing of lust and played quietly together. Even if our thighs, even if our breasts were torn, a child was beside us to tend to them. But O Lord, today, if our severed breast were to remain upon the ground, would the owner of that severed breast still be condemned as a whore?

This pain has cut off my breath. Every time it seeps into my soul, I grow more mad. This impurity left upon the dust, which has no right to speak, must repeat everything within the enclosure of its breast each time, must recite everything for itself and in the solitude of its own privacy over and over.

Once again that bulky woman spoke and continued, repeating it to us every time: of becoming a whore, of the whoredoms of women, of the impure eyes of men, of this greed and lechery of men. Yet not once did a single woman from the assembly rise and cry out:

"O wise and sensible woman, these men and women whom you denounce are our own children, mothers, sisters, and brothers. These people have not stepped into our world from another planet; they are these very embodiments of ugliness within us:

Men so lecherous and greedy, and women who are either all whores, or on the verge of whoredom, or will be turned into whores by a mere flick."

Once again one must retreat inward and stand against everything, lest whoredom befall our souls. And now, once more, one of those labeled a whore lies stranded in her ritual impurity upon this pain-drenched bed before that same habitual window.

What must one do to stay safe from this impurity within us? One must place something there so our blood does not spill onto the ground, yet even uttering its name is loathsome. How can I tell my father that I have become menstruating? Are you seeking a remedy for me? If I tell my brother, whoredom will engulf my entire being, and mother—she who detests such talk—to utter anything that holds an existence of womanhood within it is the very essence of ritual impurity.

How fortunate that she did not sit in God's place! Truly, had it been her, she would have declared us ritually impure every single day of the year. Yet thanks be to God, who has declared us ritually impure for only a few days of the month.

Mahboub Khatoun is accustomed to buying sanitary pads carton by carton. After all, she knows that all the men in the store, at the moment she purchases this demonic object, know how she has become ritually impure—perhaps even visualizing her genitalia in their minds and seeing this body of hers, left upon her soul in blood and filth.

A girl, such as I, will never have the right to purchase such a demonic object. She cannot go to the store and walk out holding a sanitary pad in her hand, because all the men in the store are waiting for her arrival so that, after she leaves, they can violate her bloody genitalia in their hearts and in their fantasies. And it is Mahboub Khatoun who will sacrifice herself as a shield for me, or will send my father to buy two or three cartons from the wholesale dealers of hygiene supplies, so that the men there in the store might cast a glance at him and say to their hearts:

"This man, too, has bared his teeth to violate the bloody genitalia of women for the sake of buying a sanitary pad."

Yet how noble and wise are the people who nestle this demonic object inside black plastic bags, lest someone else see it in public and harbor evil thoughts in their mind toward its owner.

For instance, what if a man buys that sinful stain for his wife? Surely those imaginative men can picture his wife in their fantasies, envisioning what a familiar visage she has, and violate her bloody genitalia as well.

The thought of remaining among this crowd, who interpret everything through the lens of genitalia and organs, is enough to drive one mad.

Sometimes, in my imagination, I think that whenever I am outside my home, all men see me as a naked set of genitalia walking the streets, even though I have concealed myself in the shadowy recess of a chador. Yet these men, who possess the discernment to recognize the wife of the man who bought a sanitary pad—surely I, whose face is visible, am an even better target for them.

Woe is me! This pain has torn through my entire soul, seeping into my very being until I can no longer stand on my feet. Yet in proportion as my physical strength to stand fades, my capacity for thought increases. I think more deeply, plunging ever further into the corridors of thought and memory.

The memory of the day I caught Amir changing into a fresh undergarment has chewed away at my throat—that day when, sauntering along while whistling and wandering through the house with a cheerful air, he came in the middle of the day and changed his underwear.

Suddenly, and against my will, I witnessed that scene—not the scene of him changing his clothes, but the moment he picked up his fresh undergarment. And on that day, how far my mind wandered! I pried into his entire world, unchastely dragging poor Pooneh into these imaginings as well.

Yes, he had come to change his underwear in the middle of the day because he wanted to be with Pooneh at that hour.
Why did he change his clothes?
What necessity was there for him to change that garment?
What fault could possibly be found with his old clothes?
He had traveled all this way from outside just to change his underwear—for what purpose?
Truly, I was certain that he wanted to be with a girl, and how easy it was to imagine that whore as Pooneh! After Amir went outside, I kept watch for him behind the window. Yet contrary to my belief, he did not go to Pooneh's house and walked away from the alley. It was then that I realized he had gone to be with some other girl. In my heart, I wove and recited a thousand tales that he was involved with many more girls and women besides Pooneh. How deeply I believed in these fabrications, and to what extent I endorsed them! I would weave fresh stories for them every time, plunging Amir into a sea of whoredom and lechery before the presence of a woman.
From that very day onward, I could no longer sit across from him, converse with him, or feel at ease in his presence. I did not even want him to touch me or draw near; I avoided all contact and speech with him.
Yet by the end of all these events, I never knew whether I had grown disgusted with him or with myself for seeing the world as so thoroughly sexualized and diseased.

O bulky woman, O Mahboub Khatoun, O wise maternal aunt, rejoice and triumph all of you, for I too have fallen into the abyss of your madness! It is nothing if Amir comes home, if he changes his underwear, if he even whistles amidst this changing of clothes—truly, he has adorned himself for the sake of having sexual relations with a woman; not even a fraction of a doubt exists for any other possibility.
For instance, perhaps his underwear had become soiled?
No! Is he a woman? Does he, too, become ritually impure? That disgrace belongs to women alone. And besides all this, what meaning do those whistles hold? Those very whistles would make the whole story clear.
He is a symbol of men's lechery upon the earth. How bitter and agonizing that one cannot even feel at ease in his presence! What if he saw my thighs? What if my breasts were exposed while I was working? What if my hands were put on display?
Is he not my brother? Did we not once play quietly together in the long-ago days? Did we not dwell in comfort and ease together? Yet now, in this imagined world where women are whores and men are lecherous, what if he were to violate me? What if my trousers were tight and he beheld my shameful form? What if his eyes gazed upon my body?
I remember well the time he was looking at me. His lecherous gaze was fixed upon the tips of my breasts. He was watching me closely. What if he has already violated me in

his fantasies? What difference is there between him and those men who violate the bloody genitalia of women through the proxy of a sanitary pad?

They are all from the same root and the same essence; they are all men, and they are all lecherous.

Yet in that lingering gaze of his—there, when I stood up and moved away from him—his eyes remained fixed upon that exact spot where the tips of my breasts had been long ago. Had his gaze drifted to some random point?

No, never! By doing this, he wanted to drive my thoughts away from reality. He wanted to make me fail to think for even a second upon that sinister intent, yet he could not lure me into such foolishness.

Indeed, I must ask the bulky woman and Mahboub Khatoun: Can women be buried even deeper inside the chador so that nothing of them remains visible—not even a fraction of their face—which might incite men, leading them in their fantasies to reach from that face down to the genitalia and carry out whatever sinister desires they harbor within?

Yet, oh, woe upon us! Men are even more lecherous than this, pushing the matter further still: they picture unseen women in their imaginations and will do whatever they please with them.

I loathe Amir, I loathe his drawing near, I loathe those greedy gazes cast upon my body and my soul. Would that I might never face him even once, would that not a single

second his eyes might fall upon me! I know not why, every time he looks at me, I am convinced in my imagination that his eyes are fixed upon my lips. He is a lecher and a man, and every manner of vile deed will proceed from him.

Yet, O girl driven mad by all this pain, he is that very brother who wept for hours, shed tears, and cried out when a mere fraction of the skin on your thigh was torn! He is that same child of days gone by, the one who knew nothing of lust, until suddenly the games between you dwindled; the one who knew nothing, until abruptly he was thrust away from the company of girls. He remained alone, while you retreated behind chadors, and now an ocean divides the distance between you.

You share no proximity, nothing stands between you, and you must grow ever more distant from him each time, leaving nothing of him behind, settling only into your solitude and your privacy.

O soul-consuming pain, O bringer forth of the thoughts lingering in my aching mind, I have no disposition left to endure her! That female cousin who is the daughter of that same sensible woman—she who has grown mad and sick in their world and now wanders bewildered in this madness, knowing not what to do—even her, I have no mood to converse with. She has come once more to wail to me of her plight, to speak of a husband who counts her as nothing in this world;

To speak of a man who longs to picture her like his sister—like that other female cousin of mine, that sister who possesses a fairer visage, wears looser garments, paints her lips with that magical tint, and opens her eyes in a languid gaze toward men. And now, behold the husband who projects the braided hair of that sister upon the countenance of this weary, withered woman!

I am in no mood for your lamentations. Once more you wish to wail, once more to plead: "Verily, these people withered me; these people branded my womanhood as whoredom, and I drowned in this swamp. I preserved nothing of myself, of my purity, and thus in the very prime of my youth I have taken up residence amid old age."

It is that man's right—that same lecherous man—to see a beautiful image within the being of my sister, to see her and mark what a vibrant and fresh visage she has! After all, she was not one to lend an ear to their nonsensical chatter; she carried herself farther away and went beyond; she stood up against them and forged for herself a world opposed to theirs.

Everything they commanded, she did in reverse. If they said one must possess chastity and modesty, she became unchaste and shameless; if they said one must conceal oneself before men, she laid her own being bare. She rebelled against their order, yet did so solely to set herself against them. And thus it came to pass that now, if her sister's

husband casts a gaze upon her, she answers him with coquetry and allure, baring herself before him.
Yet, O daughter of the sensible woman, are all your insights and decrees concerning that sister left behind in the house similar to those concerning me and my brother? Did that sister, too, once change her undergarments, spritz herself with perfume, and smear magic color upon her lips, until all these things transformed into her acts of whoredom?
O daughter of the sensible woman, upon your very soul, I have no strength left to hearken to your plaints! Upon your soul, I possess no more capacity to share your grief, for I myself am straitened to the depths. Whatever judgments you passed upon that sister, I have passed upon my brother—nay, not upon him alone, but upon all men, upon all women! They taught us to judge everyone, and in the end all women remain entrapped in whoredom while lecherous men struggle and thrash in pursuit of vileness and depravity. I myself have lingered in these dark depths as much as you, and perhaps even more.
So expect no sympathy from me, and leave me to my own plight!
Yet, O daughter of the sensible woman, with your coming you have once more imprisoned me in the sea of my thoughts and abandoned me to this narrow strait.
Once more I must linger in the distant past, for the entirety of my present life is drowned within that very sea of bygone

days. Someone ought to have risen and rescued that drowned past. I do not ask for its salvation, but O companions, let someone take hold of me, let someone seek out that past for me so that I may commit it to the earth! Perhaps the corpse of that pain-wracked past, left behind in the dust, will release me and allow me for a single moment to cast my gaze upon the present world—and if it grants leave, upon the future as well.

Your sensible mother was there, you yourself were there, my father and mother and brother were there, and your father sat in a corner.

Oh, woe! This little girl knew nothing of the world, knew nothing at all, and no one stepped forward to read to her even a fraction of life! No one came, and all of them abandoned her to her solitude.

Pain nested within her soul, swept through her tender life and pressed onward. Her lower abdomen ached; she curled gently inward, and in the blinking of an eye her entire private parts and genitalia grew drenched in blood.

She gazed upon her frail body:

"O Lord, what manner of pain is this? Shall I die?

Is this the end of my life?

Does this blood spilled upon the ground signify the death of my soul?

O Lord, I am afraid."

Aching and destitute, I stepped forward, took up my dwelling in your midst, and cried out with tearful eyes:
"I am dying! Blood is flowing from my body!"
The faces of all are before my gaze; not for a single second do those glances release me. The glances of your mother, the glances of Mahboub Khatoun—as though once more some vileness has issued from me! This sin-laden soul has committed transgression anew, and now the seed of this whoredom has taken root in my being. They must sit and witness, on a distant tomorrow, the whore that has risen forth.
How they made me understand through their lingering gazes that I had become a whore! What a shameless wretch I am, and how I have cast their honor to the winds!
My father's eyes, fixed upon the earth, made me understand that this was unchastity and the bringing of disgrace upon him. He wished the earth would open its jaws and swallow him unto death, so he would not have to bear such humiliation and degradation.
He possesses a daughter who has now displayed her whoredom and ritual impurity for all the world to see.
Only Amir was the one in whose eyes tears gathered; only he was the one who wanted to weep, who wanted to draw me into his embrace; only he was the one who saw my blood spilled upon the earth and whose heart burned with anguish.

Yet a stern glare from Mahboub Khatoun was enough for him to sit back down and grow still.

You were there as well, and I know that you were reciting your own memory to yourself, reading your pain within your own mind, while your father, with a faint smile upon his lips, mocked my existence. By the soul of my own wretched, aching father, he mocked him too! And after that, he mocked the nonexistent beard of Mahboub Khatoun, and finally said to his own spouse:

"Look at how the blood of your own kindred is being spilled upon the ground, bringing us to disrepute and unchastity!"

Mahboub arose and came toward me. I felt that heavy hand of hers upon my being—how she seized me from behind and led me toward the room, led me in and seated me within my chamber, and said:

"From this month onward, you shall be thus every time. You must halt this ritual impurity and not let it contaminate our entire world."

It was after that she handed me that demonic object to place against my genitalia and stem the flow of blood.

A lonely and wretched little girl, in her solitude, gazed upon her transformation into a whore—gazed upon the blood spilled from her upon the earth, upon the washing and cleansing of her body.

She cast her eyes upon the lingering gazes of all and understood how she had become a whore. Oh, woe! With

what agony I placed that demonic object against my bloody genitalia, and by Mahboub's command I had to appear before the gaze of everyone once more. I came out, seated myself quietly in a corner, and once again bore all those stares upon my soul.

Pain nested within my soul, sweeping through my entire being just like today. Yet this pain was not solely the pain of bleeding genitalia, nor solely the ache of my head and heart that caused me to burn: it was the pain of being called ritually impure, of entering the world of whores, of being covered up, of retreating into the shadows, of these meaningful stares, of a father whose spine had been broken and who was responding with shame to the smug smiles of his brother-in-law, of a mother who was cursing and damning herself for having given birth to me.

If on some distant tomorrow my breasts were to grow, I would have to loathe myself all over again. This accursed and shameful body had arisen to bring disgrace upon me before high and low. If my breasts expanded and grew larger day by day, they made me understand that unless I kept myself guarded, I would soon become a whore.

Once more it was Mahboub Khatoun who cast a severed strip of cloth over me for the purpose of safeguarding my breasts. She said nothing, but I knew she was saying:

"O source of shame, O whore-bodied one, cover your accursed body and your private parts so that lecherous men

are not incited by you. Do not even draw near unto that Amir, lest he be dragged down into your vileness."

Every time, wherever I took up my dwelling, they read to me in solitude and in secret: You are nothing more than a whore, and once again you shall come before the view of countless multitudes who will fix their evil eyes upon you and gaze with mockery, wretchedness, shame, and sorrow upon your impurity spilled upon the earth. You are a woman and a whore; therefore, shroud yourself so that strangers may remain ignorant of your existence, for whores have no place in this world.

Would that someone had quietly recited to me from some far-off place and told me that one day I would become thus! Perhaps, had I known, I would not have been so humiliated and debased, nor would I have stood stripped of modesty and chastity while gazing into your aching eyes, nor would I be floundering in this agony.

Once more I hear the sound of Mahboub's footsteps. She is coming again—what does she want this time? Perhaps she has brought me that demonic object once more; perhaps this time she has come to place a cloth in my hand so I may cover yet another shame of my body, and perhaps she will utter something new. Whatever she may utter, one thing lies hidden at its core:

You are a whore, and you must conceal this whoredom from your being and your soul, withholding it from others.

Yet the universe of my being cries out for a shriek as loud as all my pains, all my ritual impurities, and my being branded a whore. I yearn for a shout against all these sufferings. Perhaps one day I shall rise, ascend to the rooftop, and cry out naked before the gaze of all living souls:

"This is my naked body; it is neither shame nor the source of whoredom. This is merely my soul, a part of my existence. Behold it, and look deeper still within me to realize that the entirety of my world and yours does not lie solely in this organ and these genitalia. Come, let us gaze together once more beyond all these barriers, let us see the world and begin its creation anew!"

Perhaps one day, in some distant realm, with my naked body and my aching existence—while I was ritually impure and blood streamed from my genitalia upon the earth—I ascended to the heavens and sat in contemplation alongside someone in the remote distance, so that perhaps he might comprehend something of my words and transform these people.

Let the world know that my entire soul is a shriek, that I demand a shriek—a shout as loud as all my sorrows! So sit back and witness how one day I shall ascend to the heavens and bear my cry to the ears of all mankind, casting off this accursed garment from my flesh.

CHAPTER 4

I know she is talking to someone, I know she has connected with someone, I know everything. She imagines she can make a fool of me just like that brother and father of hers; she imagines she can push me away from reality with these tricks. Oh, woe is me for having such a spineless potato of a husband who knows nothing in life except waking up and going to work, whose entire thought and mind is going to work and returning to the heart of this house. Not even once has he thought about using his mind, tracing the destiny of this mad girl, or figuring out who she is communicating with. Not even once has he gone outside to follow her. How long can all the responsibilities of this life be thrust upon my shoulders? How long can I alone be expected to manage this entire life?

I wish I had another husband in his place—a towering, charismatic man with dark eyes and a strong, muscular physique so I could lean on him like a mountain, so I could call upon him for help in every trouble, and so I could place the entire weight of life upon his shoulders. But this potato lacks any backbone whatsoever. I have never even once seen him care to know what is happening to his child, let alone value his daughter's connections by even a fraction of an ounce.

Oh, woe is me for lacking a grand mountain by my side; oh, woe is me for lacking a patient confidant beside me. Every single responsibility of this life has come down to me. I must figure out this loose girl's affairs myself; I must find out myself which boy she is communicating with.

This girl was shameless and immodest right from the start; she possessed the very essence of promiscuity from the beginning. How she kept staring at the male relatives among the crowd at that party! I watched her the entire time and tracked her movements. I knew this loose girl was looking to stir up trouble. I told that spineless potato of a Saeed several times that his daughter was behaving promiscuously, that she had to be stopped, that one had to stand up against her, that you must strike her across the mouth so she would no longer display such promiscuity. It doesn't matter; no matter how spineless and bloodless this man is, I will raise Amir properly instead, so that he stands against every act of

promiscuity. Tomorrow he, too, must marry, and I would not want a loose girl to fall to his lot and drag us into disrepute through her lawlessness.

It was that very night, at the end of that same party, that Saeed finally believed the promiscuity of this shameless wretch, right when he turned to me and her father and said: "Was the name of that boy visiting our aunt's family Hekmat or Heshmat?"

With the back of my hand, I struck him across the mouth so he would never make such a blunder again. After all, you shameless wretch, what business is it of yours what the name of some strange boy is? It was then that Saeed finally understood what kind of a loose girl he had raised. After all, how is it possible for a girl to have strange boys on her mind? And now I know that in the dark corner of that room where you have buried yourself, you are either thinking of strange boys or communicating with one of those fickle-minded boys. Oh, shame upon the likes of you who harbor nothing but promiscuity in your heads!

I wish there were a man beside me, majestic and stout-hearted, to help me confront these loose wretches, to assist me in this perilous path so that I might raise a worthy child and not be condemned to punishment in this world and the next.

Anvar Khatoun was right. Every time I go to her gatherings in the mosque, I know she is opening a new truth for me.

With her large, manly physique, her vast and magnanimous heart, and all her knowledge and wisdom regarding God and the path of divinity, she knows precisely what methodology one must adopt.

It was she who whispered in my ear and made me understand that if someone from your family falls into the clutches of promiscuity, blessing departs from your life and you fall to ruin. Oh, I wish I could go into her presence right now and beg her for help, to say: "Oh knowledgeable Khatoun, oh wise woman, tell me—if phalluses were displayed to me, it is because of the upbringing of a loose girl who has set fire to our roots. If we are stranded in this quagmire and have reached this ruin, it is because of having such a daughter."

I know she would gaze into my eyes and speak calmly and serenely with her luminous, wise words: "Yes, this is your punishment upon the earth; you must cast promiscuity away from yourself and your family, for God is the worst of punishers."

Yet, Anvar Khatoun, I have no one to tell my pain to. No one is beside me to speak of this secret in my heart, to speak to her of the pain that has befallen my soul and seek her help. Neither my sister has the capacity to converse with me, nor you, who are a mature, complete, and dignified woman.

I am condemned to burn in this pain and to be alone. I must burn within myself and seek a way out for my own

deliverance. I must find a way to rescue everyone from the clutches of this misery and promiscuity. God will mete out punishment to the promiscuous—this is the utterance that is constantly repeated to my ears and stays with me. This is the phrase that you repeated from the pulpit every now and then, which I heard, and I know that now, in this dire strait, I am being punished in this manner for the deeds of my daughter.

Yet I have always brought her along with me so she could become acquainted with your teachings, always brought her with me to these gatherings so she would listen to your words. You admonish her and guide her to the right path; command her as Almighty God has commanded, so that she may take it to heart and eye and do that which creates God's command and gladness. But you yourself have seen and told me repeatedly that she is a rebellious and defiant girl.

You drilled it into my ears time and again that she is not a compliant pupil, that she does not take what she is commanded to heart and eye, and that she seeks other ways to shirk her burden. And it was you who told me that such rebels must be brought to their senses, that they must be reined in before they become the source of infamy and disgrace for everyone.

Yes, God metes out justice thus, and my hands are free to put her in her place and rein her in, to keep her from wallowing in these abominations and casting herself into the embrace

of this corruption. At times, one must build a dam against this raging sea and stand firm, even if the sea shatters that dam and surges ahead; my duty is to build that very dam against her.

I know that right now she sits in that crypt, laughing at my non-existent beard. Throughout these days she has pushed her will forward in everything, casting a promiscuous gaze at every Tom, Dick, and Harry. Indeed, the mere existence of this girl is a source of sedition and infamy. She thinks I do not remember, that I have forgotten how her very presence led everyone into promiscuity—that dimwitted nephew of spineless Saeed who lacked a shred of backbone. Back in those days when he came to our house to alter its layout, coming under the gracious guise of helping her father with some chores, she thinks I do not remember how this loose girl found an excuse every single time to come to the hall and converse with him—and that with a man who had already taken a wife for himself!

He is infamous, a libertine, entangled with countless women. Well, these very facts should make a person realize that one must not communicate with him, must not converse with him, must not go near him. But this shameless wretch—knowing full well what she has harbored in her head and heart—went to him time and again, coquetting before him every single time. She thinks I do not know that her entire being is sedition, that her entire being is fire and lust.

I have not forgotten how she acted this very way back when she was twelve years old. Whenever any male relative or boy came to the house, she wanted to go near them, to connect with them—for instance, insisting on eating lunch beside them in company. Ah, you loose wretch, these are all the stratagems of feminine wickedness! Behaving in such a manner has brought us to this fire. One must sit in seclusion and eat alone; one must never cross paths with any of these fickle-minded ones. But this seed of promiscuity had spread within her being. Every single time any of the family's boys arrived, on one pretext or another she sought to cast off her headscarf, to shake hands with them—all of these are sedition and the promiscuities brewing within her.

This girl is loose and depraved. She even led astray that cousin who was infamous and renowned far and wide for his libertinism. Every time she walked out of the kitchen with the tea tray, she drew close to him and offered him tea. I know—I who watched all your behaviors from afar, I who am of your own gender, I who know why you act this way: you change your tone of voice, you spray perfume and cologne upon yourself, you paint your lips with those magical colors, and you lean over him to place the tea upon the table. From afar, I even gazed at your lips and saw that you conversed with him while serving it.

Yes, you are lustful and shameless; you are the one who caused him to express his affection for you, you are the one

who caused him to send you love letters. I know that these very behaviors of yours made him express his affection for you in this manner and drag my honor through the dirt. That occasion was the only time I managed to mold that steamless Saeed into a proper, worthy man capable of answering you back. He did not understand that this is his honor, this is the honor of us all! This loose girl must be beaten under fist and foot; she must be made to understand that answering back to these promiscuous ways will be met with harsh retribution. That day was the only day I was satisfied with Saeed, for he did what I had laid upon his shoulders. But alas, he is never willing to accept responsibility, he is never willing to seek out these clues himself, and the burden of it all constantly falls upon my shoulders.

I know that right now, ungrateful wretch, you are once again buried in some strange world within your mind, once again conversing with someone in your thoughts. I keep every single action of yours under surveillance, from the smallest to the greatest; I know all your behaviors and I know what you are hatching.

I do not know what they teach you at that university to make you so rabid and mad. I do not know what comes over you when you unite and sit beside each other that leads you toward such rabidity—otherwise, we should have married

you off the moment you hatched from your shells so you would not become so rabid and mad!
That sister of mine drilled it into my ears time and again, warning me that I must not let you go to university, that I must send you to the house of your-destiny beforehand.
Time and again she laid out all these troubles for me—describing what sort of future lies ahead when boys and girls sit beside each other in a space where fire and tinder are placed side by side.
Yet it was Saeed's chatter once again that led us to send this shameless wretch to university. It was he once again who softened and quieted down at her whimpering, it was he who listened to her words and weakly gave a positive answer to this sinister demand.
Oh, shame upon you, spineless Saeed, for everything I suffer stems from your existence! You did not help me even an iota in raising her, and you only managed to disrupt this order and discipline that had been established.
If you had not yielded to his words that day and had allowed me to bar her from leaving, we would not be wandering in this madness today—with a young lady running off at whatever hour she pleases and returning whenever she fancies. It is entirely unclear what she is doing; it is unclear what hour she attends class and what hour she hoodwinks us to make her rendezvous. All these failures stem from the evil of your tender-heartedness and your madness.

I should have stopped her and not let her carry on with whatever she wished. Now I am left with a sea of thoughts, knowing not what she is doing, what plots she hatches in her mind, what boys and girls she is communicating with.
Woe is me, surely she is communicating with boys as well! I simply cannot fathom why they hold these classes together, side by side. If only they had handed the helm of this country and its educational system over to Anvar Khatoun! She would have known how to guide these people; she would have unfailingly separated boys and girls at every stage, refusing to let them attend classes together side by side and bring forth sedition and misery.
Yet, alas and a hundred times alas, matters are not in the hands of the competent, and they do not understand that these creatures must be kept apart from one another so that such misery does not ensue.
She thinks I am not paying attention to her; she thinks I do not know what she is doing; she imagines she can fool me just like that potato of a father of hers. She has come to meet me bearing flowers! The right and wise course of action would have been to strike her across the mouth with my hand so hard that all her teeth would spill into her mouth; I should have smashed her face so she would be put in her place and, whenever she looked upon her mouth, remember that day and that memory and know what the penalty for these promiscuities is.

Who knows which fickle-minded man gave her the flower, and now she wishes to present it to me upon returning home and treat me like a gullible fool? Yes, I do not know what you are doing; I do not know how you lure men toward yourself with your coquetries. If you are not after attracting men, then why do you paint your lips with magic colors? Why have you stockpiled so much cosmetics in your room? Every time, you fleece this steam-free potato on some pretext, and whatever money you have taken from him you spend on purchasing those demonic accessories. You think I do not know why you are so fond of those cosmetics? You think I do not know that you adorn your face with them to draw the hearts of men toward yourself, receive flowers from them, and in the end come back and present that flower to me as a gift so you can forge a safe haven for yourself?

I am not your potato of a father to believe these antics and tricks.

I am Mahboub Khatoun.

I am that woman who, when an automobile waited in the alley for you for several hours, understood everything. It lingered for hours awaiting you, and I saw you gazing out the window at him inside his automobile. I saw all of this and caught your filthy hands in that promiscuity, until you realized that I knew you had gestured to that worthless boy to leave the alley and get away from there quickly. But you mad girl, you failed to comprehend that you and I reside in

that very house, side by side! Everything about you is within my grasp. You might manage to send him away for a few fleeting moments and, in your naive delusion, cause me to fail in seizing him, but know this: I have found your corpse in that very room.

I went out and that fickle-minded boy departed the alley, but you and I remained together in that very house. If only I had slain you on that very day! If only I possessed the strength to cleanse this stain of disgrace from my forehead!

Who has ever confessed to their own unseemly deeds? Do not all thieves and murderers in prisons declare themselves innocent?

For what reason should this shameless wretch admit that she is communicating with that fickle-minded boy? Why should she admit that he was standing in the alley on account of this very heretic? The wall of denial is high, and you want to deceive me with these displays of victimization; you want to compel me through tears and bloodshed that you have no secret affair with him. But that day and Amir's blows cooled my heart!

I knew that today there is a boy beside me who can play the role of that mountain for me, with those powerful, muscular limbs that I had yearned for. He exacted retribution from you for all your deeds, right when I whispered into his ear and spoke of your lack of honor—then his whole being

turned to wrath, I saw the fire in his gaze, and I knew his blood had boiled over.

I knew that he would exact the retribution for this ugliness from you, that he would place your due right in your hands, and I knew that you would meet a rightful punishment. My own blows are of no avail against your soul; I cannot take the retribution for this malice from you, but this brother has every right to stand against his sister's lack of honor. After all, this honor is his spilled honor as well; you have stolen honor from him too, you have betrayed him too.

He, too, had the right to know and to reclaim his due from you; he, too, had to take his right from you and cleanse and purify his stained skirt—even if this purification had to be accomplished through your spilled blood. Yet he had to do it, and he had to punish you in retribution for your deed.

Now I know not what fire you are striving to stir up once more, what sedition you are plotting anew, which man you are seducing and dragging along behind you. Tell me, girl, whom have you taken after, that you behave with such immodesty and promiscuity?

You should have seen the past of my sister and me; we would not even allow a man to pass within farsangs of us. When have we ever smeared rouge and whitelead upon our faces? When have we drowned ourselves in lust and sunk into this promiscuity? Do you imagine we could not have lured

countless men toward ourselves? Do you imagine we had nothing in our store?

Have you seen your aunt's crystal-clear limbs, her firm breasts, her marble-white body? For her, or for me—whom all the men of the city desired to possess—was it any difficult task to stir up sedition and cast ourselves into the embrace of promiscuity? Was it any hardship for us to repeat your deeds? Yet we remained in purity and sanctity for a lifetime; we guarded our entire being and, in the end, surrendered it with reluctance to our husbands.

Yet, woe and a hundred times woe, that the likes of you have come solely to wallow in promiscuity!

Today's girls have all gone mad; they are all stranded in this quagmire. I know not why they have become so reckless and unhinged, why they are so hopelessly caught in the clutches of promiscuity. Nothing holds any value for them anymore. They form relationships with married men; they themselves have husbands yet commit adultery with others. Girls plunge into loose ways with a thousand tricks from the very start, and everyone—every single one of them—is drowned in this promiscuity. What has befallen these women, and how have they abandoned themselves thus to promiscuity?

Was it any hardship for me to choose a man for myself with a muscular physique, a stately stature, dark eyes, and eyebrows joined together? Was it any difficult task for me to betray that potato at every turn—him to whose embrace I

went with revulsion my entire life? Was it any hardship for me to lie in the arms of a man worthy of me and of my own caliber?

There was no hardship in it whatsoever, but I was not brought forth for promiscuity; I was not born to stir up sedition or set the world ablaze. I am accountable before the Lord of the worlds, and I consider myself His humble handmaiden. Yet, alas and a hundred times alas, that the likes of you have forgotten who you are, for what purpose you were brought into this world, and that your entire universe has been reduced to these promiscuities.

I know not what you do in that room which has become your sepulcher, but I know that you have once again set your sights on sedition; I know that you are once again seeking to connect with the opposite sex; I know that you wish to cast our honor and dignity to the winds. But banish this vain delusion from your mind, for all my senses are fixed upon you! I will not allow you to put a foot wrong for a single moment; I have devoted my entire awareness to you. If the slightest transgression escapes you, I will set your world ablaze! I am accountable before everyone, and I will not permit your seditions to set my universe on fire once more, nor shall I be punished anew for your deeds. I stand arrayed against your ugly vices, and I will not let you carry out a single wrongful act.

If only I had found a girl for Amir sooner, to have her by his side and spend his life with her! I know that countless girls lie in wait to drag him into this sedition and madness as well, but he must wed a maiden of my own choosing—a pure and righteous girl, a girl untouched by sun and moon, a girl as pure as the skin of spring blossoms. I must pluck her for my sole son, place her in his keeping, and stand by his side so that no one may ever drown him in the mad quagmire of the promiscuous.

CHAPTER 5

Oh, how stepping into the streets of this city is also fatal and maddening; one cannot step into these streets with a peaceful mind and walk with ease. I am trapped in this purgatory: whether to spend all my days in that same room with the endless wailing of Mahboub Khatoun, or to break that enclosure for a few brief days and step outside. Stepping out of that prison, too, has countless torments. Being outside that house of ghosts and the dead was my eternal wish. From childhood and those school days, I always wanted the schools to be open so that I could surrender myself to the arms of classes. Most children of the same age

sought the closure of schools, but I loathed these closures; I loved to go to school all year, all days, and all hours. I loved to spend my time always in that very school and never reach that house of ghosts and the side of Mahboub Khatoun. But alas, those times too would pass, and the holidays would arrive; once more I had to remain imprisoned within those walls, once more I had to spend the entire day with the sound of Mahboub Khatoun and Anvar and her followers, once more I had to cross out the days on my notebooks and count the days until the time of the holidays' end arrived and I could return to that same school once more.

Once more I could distance myself from this house of ghosts for even a few brief days. But school was no path to liberation either; once more there were those wise women who would sit and tell me of all the ugliness of this world during designated school hours, once more they were there to speak to us of female chastity and modesty, and once more they would spin wild tales for us about what the world is and for whom it exists.

Once more I had to cast my gaze downward and take all their words to heart without a single flaw. Once more they spoke to me of all my ignorances—how countless were those bulky, self-righteous women! They reminded me of my aunt, Mahboub, and that hulking woman of the mosque. All of these are of a single soul in different bodies; all their words are one and the same, all command a single thing, and all

demand the exact same thing from a human being. Once more I had to listen to their words in classrooms, in idle hours, during recess, in extracurricular and sports periods, amid the prayer hall, in the school office, in the vice-principal's and principal's rooms, and take them all deeply to heart.

Again the story, the story is the same old promiscuities, the story is the same refrain of earlier times. Once more they forge things for us and speak of the adornment of the veil, they weave tales of fickle-minded men, of women turned harlot on the verge of harlotry, and of Satan lurking in wait and standing before us.

They have read and known for long, long years so as to republish it for us and compel us into a compliance where we forever hear without listening and speak with eyes upon another's tongue. Yet despite all this monotony, despite all these similarities, and despite all these multiplicities that grew even more agonizing than home, enduring all the compulsions of school was still better than that house and that Mahboub Khatoun.

It was as though she had melted into all these definitions and beliefs. She had turned into a part of these beliefs, and it was impossible to distance her for even a moment from these notions dissolved into her soul. Yes, she was a part of these very beliefs, and I could no longer bear her any more than that. I wanted a shred of distance; I wanted ever so slightly to

escape that suffocating atmosphere. I wanted to breathe, even if it were in the heart of these thousands just like Mahboub Khatoun. I would go and breathe in the heart of these very people, despite all their suffocation, repetition, and commands. At last, the terror of Mahboub Khatoun was not accompanying me; she was not there so that at her command I would lose my entire world. She was not there so that with her call, her voice, her slightest frown, and her glance into my very being, I would turn to ashes, lose my wits and footing, and be unable to breathe. At least in the air of that school, the dread of Mahboub Khatoun did not accompany me, and I would purchase all other pains upon my soul so long as I could escape her yoke for even a few brief days.

Oh, shame upon this growing up! Would that I had never grown up and had spent my life right there in childhood. Would that the passage of time had never moved and I had become a child once more—not that I had enjoyed life so very much in childhood, no, never; the pains of those days have not released my grip for a single moment. Yet in those days they did not look upon me with the gaze of harlotry to such an extent; perhaps they did not look upon me so bodily and at my organ, or perhaps they did and I did not notice their carnal gaze.

Yet alas, and a hundred times alas, and woe upon that day—that ominous day when my organ turned bloody, upon that

day when my breasts grew, upon that day when I became grown and mature!

Oh, woe upon that day when the signs of maturity appeared upon my world!

Could it be that these boys in the street had been told about me as well? Could it be that they too knew of me and my world? Alas, how hard and soul-crushing it was to see them! After all, we were those very childhood friends; we were the very ones who played together and side by side, who passed our days together, and no one cast such a lustful gaze upon another. Yet what has the passage of time and this growing up brought upon us, what has it made of us, and what has it planted in our world?

When was the first time I recognized these gazes following behind me?

Even its very first time I do not remember, but I know well it began from that same era when my phallus grew engorged and my breasts swelled; I know well it was from those exact days when they cast a chador over my visage and guarded me away from others. This was a voice proclaiming to all:

She has grown and matured, come, you predators, and tear her apart; know that beneath this chador and this veiling she has hoarded countless pleasures that you caprice-seekers desire.

Woe is me, for you knew not what you brought upon our days, what kind of world this world of our phallus-worship

became, where we saw everyone solely in terms of sex and confined within these very enclosures. What does it mean to see a woman whose belly has swelled? Woe, for seeing her in this state cast countless thoughts into our hearts:
Has she lain with a man and is she carrying this child?
Yes, surely it is just so; she has lain with a man, and this swelling of the belly is the sign of that very act of theirs.
That is, how did they lie together?
What relations did they pass through with one another?
Woe, with what face does she come out into the street, and how can she come out into public view once more, knowing what everyone thinks of her?
If I thought this way about my own kind, what thoughts did those boys and caprice-seeking men—whose entire world was precisely this—entertain?
Were not men one and all caprice-seekers? Then into what world did they plunge, and with what world did they fix their gaze upon us upon beholding us?
Good grief, from a sanitary pad in a husband's hand to the face of his wife and ultimately to her bare genitals in blood, they have arrived; now, where will they reach with me, who have covered myself merely with a chador?
These lingering gazes of theirs were with me from that very day my breasts grew; every time I saw them and felt these lingering gazes upon my very soul and burned in their fire, but beyond gazes, matters even came to speech. That very

first time one of that band of boys came forward to welcome me and chanted for me, whispered to me of love beneath black chadors, spoke to me of sexual pleasures, and after that, being out in the world once more coincided with endless taunts from these men who sang lullabies to me, spun a tale of lust every time, and more than ever I understood that we are all whores and remain drowned in this whorishness.

These people know we are whores, otherwise why would they speak to us thus? We who are the pearls within pure and pristine shells, yet these people have mercy on no one and have come in pursuit of prey to drag a multitude into this whorishness.

Could these be the accursed Satan? Those countless teachers in Anvar Khatoun's glances have spoken to us so much of Satan—that Satan lies in ambush and waits each time for an opportunity to turn mortals away from God's path of righteousness and truth. Perhaps these very ones are those Satans, but their speech does not lead me to their path; rather, it repels me all the more from their contaminated world. Perhaps these ones have become captivated by the cursed Satan.

Well, whatever they have become, they are not worth a fraction of a consideration to me, for they have set my world ablaze—all of them, from that mad Anvar Khatoun to Mahboub and all these caprice-seeking men.

Looking at each of the men has laid bare the signs of their caprice-seekings before my eyes, from the eldest of them to the most childish of them. Look at any one of them and you are witnessing a fraction of this debauchery. Woe from those lingering gazes from beneath that very chador upon one's head that seek to tear apart your entire soul and sink their teeth into it; have they sharpened their teeth to rend and tear apart the frail body before them?

Yet were not these very ones my childhood playmates? Were not these very ones playing, hand in hand with me? Were not these very ones growing up and now standing before me? Those who in that distant time sharpened no teeth for me and did not wish to tear my soul apart—

Does this mean all these tearings were merely from the growing of our bodily parts?

Does it mean men too have parts for growth and emergence? Woe, once more I have yielded to transgression and sin, once more I must seek forgiveness. Do you not remember how in class and school, when we reached the chapter on reproduction, at the time when they had to speak of these matters, even the classroom teacher would feel shame and recite God's forgiveness, saying that speaking of these matters even gives birth to whorishness, one must fall silent and know and say nothing about it? But teacher, Anvar, my sensible aunt Mahboub, this world that you conceal even

from one another has encompassed your entire universe; it has not released us for even a second.

The repetition of that loathsome voice drove me mad; alas, it drove me mad, woe, for they brought me into this world to drive me mad, brought me to tear apart every single part of my body. I wish that for once I had stood bare before all of them in the street so they might come and take every grown breast of mine between their teeth and tear it apart; I wish that in that same state someone had hacked my genitals to pieces and I had remained abandoned in blood, yet by the morrow and after the passing of all the pains upon my soul, the world would no longer be a sexual one and these people would no longer worship the phallus.

The ringing of his voice drove me mad, when he whispered into my ear: Let me eat your phallus, you chadori girl, what is it you have beneath that chador and won't show us?

Woe, for every time hearing that voice, every time hearing the entreaties of these madmen carried me into the world of their madness, dragged me there to look upon everyone—even that pregnant woman—just as everyone looks. After all, they knew how one must look; they knew, and I had to become of one color with this mad congregation in order to stay alive. I did not wish to gaze upon the world in their uniform hue with only their phalluses; after all, madmen, my entire being is not just a phallus, I am not stranded in this

tiny speck of a soul, yet you have sought the entire world amidst that very line upon my body.
Alas, if only they could exile me to a more distant planet and carry me away from these madnesses.
If only I were going there to be away from these people for days, and my eyes would not fall upon their eyes again so they might see my entire world once more in that same bloody menstrual phallus. The chador upon my head and face was heavy; each time I chanted to myself, could it be this chador on my head that has stirred these madmen to see me as an embodiment of a phallus in this world?
Meaning, have they perceived me in the shape of a flying phallus whose mere utterance is that fraction of my body?
I know not, but this chador choked the breath from my lungs. I wish to step out of this black shroud for even once and be able to walk in this earth without remaining trapped in a shroud. It was for that reason that I pulled the chador from my head and walked. I walked so that perhaps their gazes upon my soul might lessen, but they stared all the more. Now it was easier for them to see my body; there was no longer even a chador to keep my soul safe from their whorish gazes. Now I was bare before them. Woe, for going and coming among these phallus-worshipers is arduous and maddening.
Whenever in any of these public waystations, there is someone who has sharpened their teeth for you—

They approach, slowly drawing close to your body, pressing their filthy form against yours, rubbing themselves against you, and after a while, if they perceive no reaction from you, they reach out to touch your breasts, to know your phallus. For a long time, he has cast his gaze upon this phallus and these breasts, picturing them in his mind over and over, and now he has risen to see whether they have grown sufficiently, whether your genitals are still bloody and left in the dirt.

The first time I felt a man's body—the body of one of those caprice-seekers—touching my form, I went mad; flush with crimson, I screamed.

Yet looking back at that countless multitude, what did it make clear? These people, one and all, are caprice-seekers; these people, one and all, are drowning in this mire. Who can be brought to trial among them? Indeed, who is ready to be put on trial? Who will put them on trial? One of those very ones who once did such a deed? Perhaps, after all, an injunction has come to them in their subconscious to do these things but not go too far; perhaps permission for such a deed has been granted to them. Perhaps each of them has done this for themselves and is satisfied and content with it. Perhaps death has taken up residence in my soul, for I am trapped in this madhouse of a world and must constantly spend my life within this clutch of madness.

That one time was not the sole instance of another's body touching my soul; that one time was not the only occasion I

was touched. Once, in a dark alley, someone laid a hand upon my buttocks; once, amidst a bus, someone squeezed my breast; once, in a taxi, someone put his hand upon my thighs.

Many times they drew close to my soul from behind, and each time they permeated everyone's soul and tore apart the purity of their spirit.

O death, sing a lullaby to me for a fraction, for I can bear no more. I wish I had exposed my bare body to them so they might come and tear my entire soul apart and desist from this madness, for with this tearing they have struck our very existence down from life. They turned away at last, they pressed their forms against another at last, they touched the measure of a breast at last, but this pain remained with us for the span of all our days. Each time we beheld that infamous hand in our world; sometimes we linked that hand with the hands of our father, sometimes with the hand of our brother, and further still with the hand of our husband. Even in sleep it did not leave us alone; it violated our soul, rent our being, and remained our companion still. The feeling of guilt and shame tore through our entire soul and pressed onward; each time we saw ourselves more impure than before, and each time there was an Anvar Khatoun for us to lift up a lament that yes, the purity of the body shall perish by this and that.

I longed to spend my entire life sequestered within that very room, neither going out nor passing my days among the gathering of the kin, for I wished to bring all of life to an end in solitude, within that very room alone. Yes, my heart desired nought but the air of solitude; I no longer wished to be out in the world with whorish gazes forever trailing after me, I no longer wished to go into the gathering of mortals who pursued me with their glances, fixed their eyes upon my body, burned my form with their gaze, and pressed onward. I did not wish to be in their company so they could tear me to shreds with their words, speak to me once of my bare phallus, of its consumption, of its being rent by teeth, of its beauty and its coitus, and drag my entire being into a sea of defilement. I did not wish to be in their company so they could trail their hands across my body, touch the sanctuary of my soul in some dark alley once, press themselves against my form softly among others once, and pass by me on a motorcycle once to both stain my body and set fire to my soul with their speech. I wished not to burn in these madnesses, to grow more and more disgusted each day with myself, with my world, with all human beings. Not a single one of my childhood peers remained, for all are stranded in these whorishnesses, all are drowned in these madnesses, and all are busy adoring this phallus-worship.

I wished to remain always within this very room and pass the entire day within this very sanctuary, but was such a world

even possible? Surely a moment later there would be a Mahboub Khatoun coming to welcome me, speaking to me once more of the whorishness lingering within my being, presenting me once more with the image of the righteous and pure maiden who is leagues away from me and my world, recounting to me once more her own childhood and adolescence to lord it over my half-dead soul, reciting to me once more the moral tales of Anvar and presenting that heavy, bulky woman as the saint of all worlds.

Since when has that bulky female saint become a saint?

Has she ever engaged in coitus with anyone?

Has she slept in the embrace of another?

Has she managed to establish a connection with anyone?

If she has, does she consider this, too, a source of shame?

How many hours a day does she dwell upon these sexual matters; has she ever thought of anything save these sexual things?

Truly, I know not in what world and with what company she lives, but I am certain that her entire universe consists of these very musings. I imagine every night she dreams of genitals and phalluses; I imagine at times she fancies that her breasts will swell until they burst and that same menstrual blood will gush forth from within. When she is out, has she ever beheld men and women save through the visage of phallus and genitalia; has she sought anything else in them worthy of contemplation?

I know not who she is or in what world she dwells, but now she has abandoned me to a desolate realm where I view the entire universe within this very shadow and the gaze of lust. This genitalia and phallus has become my entire world, and everyone feeds upon that same day.

Woe, what if in this room and in solitude I desired to defile myself?

What if I wished to wash away my despondency with a bath, what would become of me? What if my head struck a board and I wished to take a shower, to don a fresh garment, to smear a trace of that magic hue upon my lips, and to touch my body with perfume?

There would be a Mahboub Khatoun at hand to make me understand that I am naught but a whore and that this cleansing is solely synonymous with whorishness.

After all, does a chaste maiden go to the bath to such a degree, does she soil herself thus? That is the sole work of whores. If a maiden has gone to the bath twice in a single day, she is beyond doubt one of the whores and has sullied her body for coitus with others.

Yet Mahboub Khatoun, perhaps I, the mad one, have grown weary of this defilement lingering upon my soul. Keep your purity for yourself—for that same bulky, sensible woman, for that same sister of yours with crystal flesh. I desire to be a whore after all; I wish to go to the bath and cleanse this blood lingering upon my body, but I do not want you to call

me a whore, I do not want you to subject me to the assault of your accusations—saying yes, she is a whore, saying yes, she has cleaned and purified her body to surrender it to others. Woe upon us from the day a maiden desires to rid herself of her surplus hair. If she speaks of such a matter with the Mahboub Khatouns, what shall befall her? If she wishes to trim the hair surrounding her genitalia, what a grave blunder she has committed! Does a chaste maiden even ponder such a subject, can she bring herself to such an act, can she cast away her surplus hair and entertain such a shameful thought? This hair must be left to grow long and be braided; perhaps it, too, is a part of women's virginity. Perhaps it must grow so dense and cover the phallus that, like a chador, it buries the entire body in invisibility. Perhaps upon the wedding day the man must trim it and see what is entombed beneath all that hair.

Woe, for I desire no such world; I wish not to reduce all of married life and the having of a spouse to this very phallus and genitalia and hymen and surplus hair, abandoning everything to the clutch of these very gazes. I desire things far beyond these madnesses, and I have been in search of those beyonds, but it is a vain delusion to cast one's gaze toward such a world among this congregation.

Once more I recall their words; once more they spin their tales. Once more they must see who has wed, what they did upon the nuptial night, whether she lay in a man's embrace,

whether he did aught with her. Perhaps, after the fashion of days of old, they must go and sit behind their thresholds to behold the bloody cloth so they might believe the maiden is a virgin. But no, today the world has advanced, and the world of the phallus-worshipers has advanced as well; no doubt they take her to a doctor's surgery to examine her phallus and every part of her body lest the hand of a stranger has touched her. Yet does that examiner also discern the gropings of caprice-seeking men in the streets?

For instance, do they comprehend that single time they laid a hand upon my breast? If they understood, what judgment would they pass upon me; have I lost all my purity?

What if one day upon the box of magic they displayed a match of men's wrestling, what happens if I too sat and fixed my gaze upon that match? What if in that very moment and that very place Mahboub Khatoun and my sensible aunt were present, or a thousand like them—what would they think of me? Do they likewise believe that I have cast my eyes upon the bodies of men, upon the muscular majesty of their forms? Setting myself aside, does Mahboub Khatoun not cast her gaze upon their bodies, has she not beheld their majesty? Why does Mahboub Khatoun on so many occasions fix her eyes upon men's trousers?

With my own eyes I have seen it several times; even on many occasions she has complained of it herself—for instance, grumbling at the way a man sits, as though he has put his

entire body up for auction, or asking why that mad fellow has not zipped his trousers. Then why did I not understand, why did I not look at his trousers and, more than that, at the unzipped fly of his trousers, while Mahboub Khatoun has her entire attention bound up in that very trouser and that very unzipped fly?

Amidst that wrestling match, does she gaze once more at that very spot of the fly?

Does she see once more that that portion of his body is swollen and larger than the rest of his parts? Has she beheld anything else save this phallus and genitalia?

For instance, how they wrestle with one another, how they apply holds, how they skillfully lift one another.

Perhaps when those two fell to the earth upon each other, Mahboub went mad and everything took on a sexual hue for her once more; she came, turned off the box of magic, and reminded me that a pure maiden does not fix her gaze upon such scenes.

This pure maiden has made my life a living hell—I, who always floated between this whorishness and purity, each time seated in the lap of whorishness while that exalted image of purity was placed ever further away so I might only gaze upon it and know that this image lies in the distance, not made for my attainment; it can only be seen and envied. That sacred station belongs solely to those sensible women who have viewed the world entirely through phallus and

genitalia—and I, who perhaps in some distant time shall attain this lofty station, perhaps when I have reached these madnesses to such a degree that I remember nothing more of myself, perhaps like Mahboub Khatoun I shall bathe once a week and even then with reluctance, shall not look upon my body because it is a source of shame, shall never adorn myself, and shall look upon everyone merely through the guise of bare genitals in the street. Perhaps it was then that they would call me by the likeness of the pure-bodied.

Amidst those distances and those childhood days were friends with whom we lived life, with whom we grew up. Yes, after the era when walls were drawn between us and the boys and they were removed from our gatherings, we were imprisoned amidst those chadors with swelling breasts and bloody phalluses, while the boys were seated in the distance with sharpened teeth so that whenever they could, they might rub their forms against our bodies, take the measure of our breasts in their hands, and touch the blood upon our genitalia. They remained, full of malice from these separations, speaking words to us each time and setting fire to our world each time with words, with glances, with hands, until nothing remained of those friendships—even between myself and Amir, with whom we were worlds apart, yet all our friendship was forged with our own kind.

Our entire world became with one another and beside one another; everywhere we were together, beside one another

we pushed the world forward and advanced into the universe. Each time we were together and our entire world was one another—in class, at school, at home, in solitude, with speech and words, with touch and embrace, everything within us was knotted together, and one of those peers became my comforting anchor so I might view the world with her and beside her.

Nothing more remained for me, and I had to find everything in the universe within her being. What a world this world of ours would be! All pains and griefs, all confessional heart-to-hearts had to be spoken with one another; we had to be together, and we had to pass through the world together—together in solitude, together in the room, together in class, and at last together in an embrace.

She opened her arms and pressed me to herself once; my form, transcending all this phallus- and genitalia-worship, longed for a warm embrace wherein to weep, wherein to soothe my sorrows with her and beside her. My heart yearned for a warm embrace so that beside her I might know this body is not shameful, so she might make me understand through her flesh that we are not filthy and whorish—we are human, and this is a part of our being.

Yes, she opened her arms so that within her embrace we might come to know other things upon each other's bodies besides the phallus and genitalia. In the midst of the class, when the mad ones would rise up once more to recite tales to

us of chastity and purity and modesty and a thousand other things, we would join hands, pressing our hands together, and within the shelter of those hands we would whisper quietly to one another that purity transcends these idle mutterings.

She spoke not, nor did I ever read aloud, yet our grieving hands spoke; those hands that were of our very soul spoke: purity resides not in this flesh, nor in the genitalia, nor in the phallus, nor in the hymen and surplus hair; purity transcends all these things. Quietly our hands whispered into the ear of our bodies; quietly they spoke and chanted to us, cleansing the flesh deemed whorish and making it pure and holy.

Quietly in the embrace, our hands wept; these suppressed limbs, this soul dragged into defilement, spoke to one another of their pains and grew warm. With the warmth of their being, they cast every whorish thought far from our world, and beside one another we came to life once more, living anew beyond the sick world of these people.

Our entire world was being together; we possessed nothing else in the universe save our togetherness. Thus it was that the world advanced and matured within us—this time neither possessing breasts nor bloody genitalia, this time transcending this world of phallus-worship, maturing into tenderness, maturing into affection and love, springing forth each time in a fresh dream and taking root within our hearts.

She reached out her hand to my hair and stroked the locks gently with her fingers, saying:
How beautiful it is!
I placed my hand over hers, pressed her fingers softly in my grip, and said:
How beautiful it is!
Yes, our entire soul was beautiful; neither filthy nor whorish. On that day when she smeared the magic hue upon her lips, I said: with this hue your lips are more beautiful than before; her crimson-tinted visage grew quiet and began to speak: the scent of your body is beautiful as well, and draws me into a world of beauties.
Each time, hand in hand, gazing into each other's eyes, we pictured everything they had robbed from our world and built it anew together. Yet not much time passed before the phallus-worshipers understood, casting their gaze down beneath the desk at our intertwined hands. The school became a hell once more.
They kindled a fire to burn the whores within it; they came and declared: these are whores, these ones clasp hands in an embrace, these ones seek to lay hands upon each other's phalluses, to squeeze each other's breasts.
Yet, O phallus-worshipers, whatever you believed in, it was none of these; not a single one of them had a place in our hearts. We freed ourselves from the shame lingering within

our flesh; we pictured the world as something far beyond phallus and genitalia.

Whatever your belief may have been, we desired something far beyond these madnesses; our weary bodies came forward to declare that we are not objects for the expression of whorishness, that we have come to learn tenderness, that we have come to bestow tenderness. But alas and alack, the world was the world of the phallus-worshipers, and they viewed everything through swollen breasts and bloody phalluses, picturing our hands beneath the desk as fastened to each other's phalluses.

O breath, remain somewhat calm and come no more, for I have no endurance left to stay. Would that you, too, had remained calm, burning a fraction with the shame of these people who have scorched the entire soul, and extinguished yourself, for your absence is the end of our world for a time. Would that you had grown calm so that we, too, might find peace for a second; but you came, and with your coming and going the world began anew. Once more they came and accused us of everything conceived in their minds; a thousand trials were held: these two maidens are the disgrace and immodesty of society, these ones make the throne of God tremble. Each person fabricated a tale to follow:

One said she had seen them in each other's embrace,

One said the two had kissed,

One said they pressed each other's hands, yet no one said they loved and cherished one another. Everything once more became genitalia and a phallus, everything once more fell captive to the very same bounds, and a thousand Mahboub Khatouns arose to call us whores.

They struck us across the face, they branded us as whores, once more with their dark and gloomy world they darkened our universe, and once more we were left stranded in ritual impurity.

The tale of our clasped hands spread far and wide; Mahboub Khatoun heard of it, turned the house into a hell once more, consumed us in fire, and cursed herself anew, asking what punishment of which sin this was. To possess me—what deed of hers in this world was it the penalty for? Once more she felt shame for having me, once more she begged God to turn me to stone; would that she had birthed a stone in my stead—and on it went.

Tell me, what did they do to you, what manner of torment did they inflict upon you, what did they do to your gentle hands that offered me the gift of love? My hands have grown softly homesick for you, longing once more for your warm embrace. I desired your embrace beyond phallus and genitalia; I know that you do not understand, for after all, your world has yielded nothing beyond the phallus. Whatever existed was thanks to that very phallus, yet tenderness, too, is alive in the world, yet tenderness, too, is a

part of our universe—even though the phallus-worshipers have buried it all in the dirt and we have been branded as unclean.

Our classes were severed from one another; beyond that, our school grew more and more distant. They no longer permitted us to see one another or to clasp each other in an embrace. If you were here now, my entire soul would weep for you, would plead and lament anew, would nestle in your embrace once more to tell you what they did to her in these days and what they recited over her, and your body would gently gather her into an embrace and speak to her of tenderness. But they permitted not a single shred of tenderness to remain in our world, for everything was summarized in the phallus and genitalia.

School continued all the same; we even reached the university. Once more it persisted, and once more they came and recited their thousands of verses. Once more everything was summarized in the phallus and genitalia; once more they came and spoke of our shameful and disgraceful bodies. We heard it all anew; once more there were many in the classes who spoke of the grandeur of the veil, once more they came and painted countless pictures of the veil and this pearl within its shell.

Once more their lust-filled world continued; once more everything, devoid of love and tenderness, persisted within genitalia. They sat for many, many hours and recited to us:

once a man with a turban upon his head uttered those very same tales that a bulky-framed woman had spoken; once a woman in an ornate and comely chador uttered those very same tales that the sensible aunt had spoken, and in every utterance I beheld Mahboub Khatoun in them all. Everyone was Mahboub Khatoun; each one, in some guise, touched the flesh, spoke of the world's pain, discoursed upon whorishness, upon the shame of our bodies, squeezed my breasts—one and another and another, and all were Mahboub, all were Khatoun, all were lust, and all were a phallus.

Once more they would come and once more they would persist, and each time it went on. They spoke and declaimed so much that the entire world became a phallus, the entire world became genitalia, and the entire world remained drowned in purity and whorishness, leaving nothing more of the universe. And once more I longed to be alone, once more I desired to make my lair within that very room, once more I wished to be buried within that very chamber so I might hear nothing of these people's world and remain far from their realm.

Yet Mahboub Khatoun, you are everywhere—one of you is inside the house, and a thousand of you are in the streets. If one day, through some tribulation, I stepped out of the house—for instance, if for a moment my headscarf slipped

from my head—countless Mahboubs are there to raise a cry of whorishness.

They come back and speak to me; once more there are Mahboubs who fix their gaze upon the phallus and genitalia, who stare at breasts, and once more in the classrooms and the university there are Mahboubs who speak to me so endlessly of ugliness, whorishness, ritual impurities, and loathsomeness that I grow mad, return to the room once more, and once more Mahboub declares that the whorish maiden soils herself, goes to the bath, and adorns herself with perfume.

O breath, come a little more softly and be somewhat still, for they have robbed the breath from me. Sleep and be at peace, perhaps in sleep they shall lift their hands from your head and view the world a fraction further away from this phallus and genitalia. Sleep, for perhaps only in sleep could you escape these people's world, perhaps in sleep you could behold a vision far from this universe, and upon waking you shall build that vision—so breath, remain calm that I may find a measure of peace.

CHAPTER 6

My heart aches for *Mehr*,
my heart yearns for warm hands and an embrace overflowing with tenderness. I surrender myself to every accusation of *herzagi*; let the wise sages call me base and depraved, but my heart yearns for *Mehr*. By everything you hold sacred and worship, my heart longs for *Mehr*. I am weary of this world tainted by your lust; leave me be, if only for a fraction of a moment, so that I may love, so that I may be stained by *Mehr*. I wish to surrender myself to being deemed *najas*; I wish to cast myself into the swamp of *herzagis* and become polluted by the times. My heart longs for your hands, so full of *Mehr*. If only you were here, that I might yield myself to your embrace; if only you were here,

that I might linger within your arms for a while and escape, even briefly, this world drowned in gender and sex. But alas, they stripped from my being every relic of you; they burned your letters. What did you write in them? What did you say that turned everything into blasphemy?

Is affection and love a blasphemy?

Yes, in the creed of these people, everything turns into blasphemy, and nothing of *Mehr* remains.

Mahboub Khatoun, have you ever known even a fraction of love?

Have you ever pressed a hand in *Mehr*?

O masters of my age, you wise sages, you omniscient ones filled with pride, have you ever held *Mehr* in your arms?

Have you ever ached with longing?

Have you ever tasted the sorrow of separation? Has your heart ever beaten for someone? Have you ever longed to take someone into your arms?

Has it ever happened that you gazed upon someone, stripped of *genitalia* and *awrat*, holding those hands overflowing with *Mehr* within your own, and looked into their eyes, far removed from lust?

My heart longs for your hands; my soul flutters with the longing for your written words. I could no longer hold you in my embrace; they no longer allowed me to clasp even a memory of you to my chest. Yet you lived on in my mind, taking flight and soaring higher each day. The memory of

your hands and holding them in an embrace intoxicated me. Ah, if only Mahboub would come to me one day; if only father-like, he would take me into his arms; if only I could weep once in Amir’s arms and speak of my heart's griefs.
If only we had missed each other, if only, and if only, a thousand such if-onlys—yet nothing remained for me, and once again the repetition of those distant tales drove me mad. Not to hear is also a blessing; if only I had not heard, if only your words did not trample my soul each time, so that I might find a shred of peace, so that I might forge my world a little further away from your world and choose solitude within it. But alas, your voices forever clawed at my ears and tore their membranes.
Are these tearing membranes also the end of purity?
Does the intrusion of a finger or a blow blemish the purity of the ear?
In this confinement and captivity, my entire soul is bound in chains; one cannot escape this enclosure, one cannot turn away from this madness. One must seek a way to stay a little removed from this air and inhale a fresh breath, but alas and a hundred regrets, the air of this entire city is poisoned. The scent of these very madnesses was inhaled once more, and they murmured those same distant tales into my ear. Yet enduring a Mahboub so close drove me mad; but seeing her in this vicinity transformed me into a butterfly, and I spread my wings and took flight to dwell in distant lands, so that if

the Mahboubs must be seen again, they might be seen from afar, smaller and less.

I went and grew distant, so distant that I might escape this closeness to the Mahboubs. Yet Mahboub was beside me, appearing each time in a different guise and drawing closer to my soul with every moment. I must tell them that I want to work, that I want to secure a job far from the house and build a world beyond it. They drew their daggers and stepped forward to tear apart whoever wishes to change the world, whoever wishes to shatter the fashioned idols. But patience and forbearance have made their nest in the station of desires; through toil, what lies in distant lands can be realized.

So I grew distant, went to far-off places, and carved out some work for myself. Yet there were still thousands in that bread-market who painted the world as merely sexual and diseased; they were still there to fix their gaze upon genitalia, to stare at the swelling breasts of maidens.

You would give bread, and they would touch your hands. What on earth was there in the touching of this loveless hand, you madmen, that you purchased even a moment of stroking it at the cost of every infamy?

If only I could step into the courtyard and speak to them naked of *Mehr*, telling them: "O you phallus-worshipers, here is my *awrat*, here are my swelling breasts; stroking them by force will yield nothing, gazing upon them will cure

none of your pains, and you will remain drowned within the claws of madness. Behold them, tear them apart, but know this: to embrace a hand with *Mehr* will build a world for you such as you have never experienced."

Once more they thrust their hands forward, groped amidst the buying of bread, and took pleasure in their madness. In the end, no one came to speak to them of *Mehr*, to build for them a world beyond the confinement in which they are trapped, to tell them that embracing and seeking pleasure belongs to *Mehr*, to affection, to love and fondness. No one told them anything, and they were driven by instinct. The slaves reached out and groped everything, sparing not even hands; even the fleeting friction of one hand against another by force became the ultimate pleasure of these instinctive thralls.

Once more, harlot-gaze eyes sprouted upon bodies, and once more, within the claws of my own madness, I beheld what was perhaps far removed from reality. After all, it was these very people who raised me, these very people who taught me and showed me the way.

Mahboub, you made everyone understand; you pictured the entire world and displayed it to us. Mahboub, the entire world belonged to you, and you led the charge, spurring on the high priests within this madness. Thus it was that I, too, was swallowed sweetly down your throats, consumed, and

digested within your claws, seeing everything just as you taught my soul.

Those who deemed everything *herzeh* saw only *herzegī*, and in this *herzegī* they made everyone a *herzeh*. They viewed all lustful men as nothing but lustful; she gazed, looking quietly. Where had your eyes been fixed? If she looked into your eyes, you saw lips, and if she fixed her gaze upon your being, you heard breasts.

In the end, they left no room for you to see anything; they proclaimed everything, and you had already heard it all beforehand. No place remained for your own sight. Women wrapped in shrouds are meant to be hidden from lustful men; what else will remain save men who will fix their gaze upon breasts, who will stroke their genitalia, perhaps brushing their hand against yours by mistake? Yet these men are lustful; these men are lechers and gapers. Thus, undoubtedly, they whispered it into your ears, and you heard it all, seeing nothing as he withdrew his hand back into himself. Men, stay away—further than ever, far from your entire bodies. Stay further away; do not draw near to us, push yourselves back and remain behind, for your slightest approach is a sign of your lechery.

He who casts his eyes upon the ground and refuses to look upon a face—what does he think he is accomplishing by planting his head in the dirt? Why do you not look? Is our

vision a fault and a transgression? Is closing one's eyes to the entire world your only solution for existence?

One must not see, one must remain blind; one must not touch, one must be nothing in order to become pure. To cast a glance upon faces is to cast a lustful look upon the reddened lips of women; to look lower is to look upon swelling breasts. I grew weary, frantic, and mad—take your hands off my collar! I wish to see more freely than you do. Look! Every time you carry the sacks of flour on your shoulders, look at me. Fix your gaze upon me; I will judge you no more. Perhaps you, too, in your anguish, have come in search of *Mehr*; perhaps you, too, have spoken of tenderness; perhaps if your gaze rests lower than my face, you are not staring at my breasts; perhaps you, too, have grown sick to death of these people's world.

Carry the burdens upon your shoulders and step forward; perhaps we will speak for a time, perhaps our gazes will lock upon one another, perhaps when you looked at me I blushed with shame and you smiled. Perhaps this very simplicity of ours brought us peace, perhaps it pulled us a fraction away from the world of these people. Let them talk as much as they like, until they forge yet another proof for their tainted world. Let them say you are a gaper and I am a *herzeh*. Let their minds picture you and me upon our bed. Let them strip my genitalia and yours bare and fix their gaze upon them. But I—who have beheld you in hands overflowing with

Mehr, who have sought you in your quiet smiles, in your gentle speech and your dignity—let them say whatever they please, but you must not be what they said.

Every day you came at the exact same hour and looked once more. The memory of the *Mehr* of bygone days stirred within me, and I pictured it anew—that time when our hands were intertwined and we spoke without words. Perhaps once again the quiet of our weary souls and aching bodies will speak; perhaps once more we will manage to return *Mehr* to our world. Thus, every time you came, carrying the world upon your shoulders and dragging everyone away with your pain into distant realms—would that you could have banished all the gazes of strangers from our world with those very burdens!

How calm you were when I brought you a sherbet! Sip by sip you drank it, and your entire soul, left burning in the fire of love, was soothed by the coolness of my sherbet. Drink from the essence of my soul, drink, for I have seen your weariness, I have tasted your sweating brow. How beautifully and with what dignity you looked! I no longer wish to add anything from the world of these people to my existence; I wish to allow no pathway from them into my world. Let them say whatever they choose.

Let them say:

"This *herzeh* girl has led the boy's world astray into *herzegī*."

Let them say: "That lustful boy wants to deceive the innocent girl."
Let them say: "These two unchaste ones have sullied purity."
Let them say whatever they wish; let purity belong to them alone, let them brand us as impure and tainted. I wish to be called a *herzeh*.
"O people, a *herzeh* with her naked body has come to your dreams! Behold her body, tear it apart, and declare that she is a *herzeh*!"
Yet you looked once more, looking at me quietly, fixing your gaze upon my eyes. Your eyes spoke, speaking of our shared pains, of all the sufferings of the age that we have carried on our shoulders. You, too, like me, have tasted pain; you, too, were branded a lecher. Yet you, who held no lust in your head, you who came for *Mehr*, you who came to taste a drop of the nectar of *Mehr* beyond these people's slaveries and take flight—
I came, I came once more, and with nectar in hand I sat before you so that you might speak once more to my soul with your gaze. Every time you looked at me, and every time you made my soul understand more deeply that I had fallen in love, that I had sought the entire world in your gaze. How beautiful and tranquil was the world with you! How far I drifted from everything these people have built, how quietly I took flight with you, and how leisurely I traversed the world!

The fire of the love within our beings illuminated the world. That very first time I touched you—what a sublime dream it was, unrepeatable and soaring in the heavens!

O phallus-worshipers, interpret it however you wish, but to touch a soul in whom you have perceived *Mehr* is the highest feeling known to humanity, the loftiest ascension to the cosmos. Once more I shall come among you with a naked body, once more I shall speak to you; but you, who have pictured the world in terms of genitalia and *awrat*, will possess no capacity to understand. You must tear away the foul garments of your predecessors, you must plunge yourselves into this sea, learn how to swim, and feel it!

At the touch upon your hands my body trembled; the touch of that beautiful body of yours brought me peace. My entire being turned into a heart and throbbed, my breath grew ragged. You felt it all, too—you who have not been tainted by the world of these people, you who have seen and touched something loftier than the world of these people, you who have not remained stranded in their world. This love shall give you birth anew and make you believe; it shall make you comprehend what has never been contained in writings, nor ever will be.

In this world where it is you and me and no room remains for anyone else, they came once more, they pressed upon us once more, they touched us once more, they hurled insults once more, they pulled the headscarves back onto our heads,

they beat us over the heads with compulsory veils once more, they spoke and cast allusions once more. Once more the Mahboubs emerged and branded everyone a *herzeh*, and everything in the world of these people was merely the repetition of days gone by. But you were there, and my world changed; I heard nothing more of these people's world, I saw nothing more of their world. The entire world was simply being and staying with you—that feeling of liberation and falling in love, that teaching whose school no one else possessed, that which brought me to life once more, adorned me anew, and made me enduring.

Perhaps it was not even you at all, but that beautiful feeling, that something transcending this mundane world, that transformed existence for me. That fragment from the ancient days, those hands and those spoken words, those ancient echoes and the allusions of bodies pure called *najas*—

This time they proclaimed themselves with greater force and arrogance; this time they made me understand that the world transcends this genitalia in blood, transcends the swelling breasts. This world and this feeling transcend whatever these madmen have woven together.

With you I grasped everything, with you I felt everything, with you I began everything anew, and with you I came to life once more.

Yet these things belong to the world stretched between you and me; you and me do not constitute the entire world. The *alt-parastan* still haunt our world; they are still here to poison the cup of life for us and pour the hemlock down our throats.

The rumors spread, hands were seen once more, the same tale of the *alt-parastan* was recited once more, and they chanted it all over again. These people are *herzeh* and base; these people have sullied the divine throne with their *herzegī*; these people have cast honor, chastity, and modesty to the winds. How blessed is the zeal of this *herzeh* girl's brother and father! What honor she has squandered from her family! Where is their zeal? And the talk went further, spreading until it reached the ears of Mahboub Khatoun.

Mahboub went mad; she understood everything, and all her fabrications of these past years scattered to the winds. What were you saying to yourself in those days, Mahboub? What were you reciting?

O wise woman, O my sister, forgive me for casting our family honor to the winds. Anvar Khatoun, I was not like this; this girl did not reach this pass through my upbringing. She was a *herzeh* by nature and brought me shame before the eyes of all.

O Lord Almighty, O Exalted One, forgive me if this little *herzeh* girl has acted thusly. Do not lay her sin upon my shoulders; You are great and forgiving.

What else did you say to me, Mahboub? What did you read out? Were you joyful, or sorrowful?

Were you joyful that you had known me from the first day? What pride you took before the eyes of that broken-backed father! You struck at him with taunts and humiliation every time, declaring that all this calamity stems from his foolishness and madness.

How jubilant you became over your judgment of me! How drunkenly you branded me a *herzeh*, declaring that *herzegī* runs in my warp and woof, in my very blood!

How sorrowful and ashamed you grew over your lost dignity! Everything you wove over these years was torn asunder, turned to dust, washed away, and you remained stranded in this mortification and shame. Yet you exacted your vengeance upon me and the one who loved me!

Strike, beat me thus until my body is torn and bloodier than ever! Pound upon my soul until all your malice is spent! Beat me and assail me until you find peace—though nothing will ever bring you peace. Advance once more and whisper into Amir's ears; speak of a lack of zeal, tell him that the threshold of your family has been stained. Speak to him of the zeal of the men of old; perhaps Anvar helped you in this endeavor, perhaps she whispered a hadith to you so that you

might paint unzealfulness as the blackest of evils before Amir. Groom him, stoke his fury, cast him out, and send him to fall upon my soul so that you may exact your toll in suffering and your vengeance in blood!

Perhaps he went and took his life—would that make you yet more joyful?

I know not, but bathing him in blood makes you mad and intoxicated. When the scent of blood drifts through the air, you grow yet more delirious. Drag me down to *najas*, strike upon my head and face once more and spill blood upon the earth, for it brings you peace. The scent of blood fills the air, and you know all the more that I am impure.

Now you have bathed me in blood; now that I sit before you in my blood, you can with easy mind call me *najas* at every turn, deem me a *herzeh*, and gaze upon my lingering in blood.

Yet Saeed has been left empty-handed by this spectacle; weave a fool's cap for him as well and place it upon his head so that he too may enter the fray. Perhaps he went and shouted in that bread-shop and workshop; perhaps he accused the master of that place of debauchery and *herzegī*; perhaps he landed a few slaps upon that boy's ear; perhaps he shouted and you saw in that spineless potato a touch more manliness; perhaps his frame grew mightier, and perhaps—

Saeed, fling yourself upon my soul as well so that you too may exact all your griefs from me, shouting that all our honor has been cast to the winds!

Where does this water come from, and where does it flow, that it all rests within my hands? To clasp hands in an embrace is to lose all that water from one's grasp, leaving nothing behind. From which river have you drawn this water? Would that you had one day shown me its source so that I might draw it full for you and bring it to you a thousand times over, filling your lives with that water until no hand, nor even another's genitalia, could cause it to be lost!

Saeed, you too strike me; I have interpreted every blow as your warm embrace. I have turned your every refusal to hold me into an embrace denied. I transformed the hand that struck your face into a kiss that never left my cheek. In my imagination, I turned all your fists and kicks into a caress of my hair. Strike and find your peace; perhaps these beatings will bring you a shred of calm, perhaps they will lessen your pain—if your pain is thus eased, if the lost water returns thus to your stream, then charge forth and strike!

Those intertwined hands restored sovereignty to Mahboub. She became king once more, and as commander she ruled over the lives of others:

A girl does not go to university.

A girl does not go to work.

A girl who does not speak to others
A girl must be married off before she hatches from her shell
Now you are the commander, charge ahead and rule, decree that all of
us are condemned, I, the condemned, must bow to
everything you say and heed it all with the ear of my soul,
I must take it all in with the ear of my heart and read it all
forward, for you have decreed that you have come as ruler
over the world to carry your wisdom forth
The word husband echoed through the house, and the entire house smelled of husband,
Yet what have I seen and heard of husband, what have they
told me of that man who will become master of my soul,
That distant image stands before my eyes, that far-off time when I suddenly
came upon the house, right there where the idol shattered
before me and crashed to the ground,
Mahboub, do you remember, did you understand, did you know that I
have seen it all, did you know that I saw you and Saeed
locked in embrace, holding each other,
Alas, that breath was trapped within my chest, I saw you in embrace,
Yet there was no tenderness between you, no love
commanded it, for it was pure instinct that possessed you
both,

A thousand times I replayed that ominous day in my heart,
every time your faces rose before me as you tore each other's life apart,
You had taken refuge in Saeed's embrace
And he had taken you into his arms, he had besieged you and was tearing your flesh, you were yielding your life
And he, mounted upon your soul, was tearing your life apart,
Alas, that naked phallus and this naked body drove me mad, you never told me once
And I knew nothing of this existence, I wish you had whispered to me once
How you created me, I wish you had recounted the story of your embrace to me just once
So I wouldn't have to see that very image before me and hear this tearing apart,
You who thrust the entire world before me as a phallus and said nothing to me of tenderness,
So I saw nothing of that embrace born of tenderness, and it was all phallus, all
Naked genitalia, and what did a child know save for hatred and the shattering of an idol that drove my world to madness,
I wish I had seen a particle of tenderness in your embrace, I wish a kiss
Had lingered upon your lips so I could picture you both in tenderness, but it all became tearing,

It all became a naked phallus, I grew disgusted with Saeed, I deemed you a whore,
After all, your every utterance was about whoredom in these existences, there was nothing of tenderness in it, and what did this child, having heard of whoredom, witness save for the tearing of your souls?
Now the name of husband rings in my ears
And I shall interpret it as the tearing of my body,
Is he too coming to tear my soul apart,
Does he want to sink his teeth into my naked flesh,
Does he want to shred the bloody phallus to pieces,
He wants to bring me to blood and show my spilled blood to others,
To make others understand that I was a virgin,
To make others understand that this is his prey,
He has hunted me and my entire soul belongs to him,
I wish you had nurtured a particle of tenderness
And turned away from this raw lust, I wish you had consigned this genitalia and phallus to oblivion
And made tenderness the dwelling of our house instead,
Woe unto that day when I heard you with my own ears
Speaking to Saeed about my hymen, alas, with your tongues you set me on fire once more,
Reduced me to ashes, and made me realize once again that everything in the world lies in the genitalia and phallus of women and men,

Once more you plotted to take me for an examination,
Know that I am pure and untainted,
Yet you, oh phallus-worshipers, our world was forged in tenderness,
There was no phallus in it, it was all tenderness and romance,
It was all embracing, and a hundred paces of pity that you knew nothing of it
And saw the entire world as manifest genitalia and phallus,
You portrayed everyone in a naked embrace
Moaning, seeking pleasure, peddling purity, offering up their flesh,
And alas, everything became phallus and genitalia once more,
The owners of naked bodies stepped forward, and if a hand reached out in tenderness,
You portrayed that hand as gripping a swollen breast
And once again fixed your gaze upon their bloody phallus, waiting for virgin women to await them on the day men and women mingle,
The prattle of your tongues became purity and my hymen,
I went mad, once more your image stood before me, flesh tearing from flesh,
And Saeed in the distance, baring his teeth to make your flesh bleed, for a phallus stained with your blood,
Saeed, until now you held a small place in my soul,

In my heart, with everything you had and had not, I accepted you and became one with you,
But by speaking of the purity of my body,
By your untrusting doubt, by your quest to have me examined, you killed my entire world,
You too did not see me as I was,
You did not see how I struggled to embrace your hands,
You saw nothing of me and left nothing standing in my world,
Mahboub is the ruler of the religious law and the world of all,
Oh Mahboubs of the age, oh phallus-worshipers of the world,
Bind me once more, take me to the coroner's office to examine my hymen
Lest the spilled blood from my ever-bloody phallus wash away a drop of your ditch water,
Take me and assail me, even if I am pure, assail me
And recast the form of lust in another mold wherein the virginity of girls is preserved,
For you have understood since days of yore just what they fed you,
This is the labyrinthine pain of a thousand ages that has nested within us,
And you spell out precisely what you were taught,
So tear me apart just as they tore you apart,
For they taught us how to tear and granted us nothing,

They banished everyone far from tenderness and fashioned it so that the entire world throughout all ages would be buried in the abyss of lust,
She must be married off,
This stain of disgrace must be cleansed from her forehead and skirt,
She is the source of disgrace and scandal for us all.
Anvar came and recited to you, that sagacious woman, that crystal-bodied aunt, came
And spoke to you of these very things; Mahboub was outside, and a thousand Mahboubs beside her; all the phallus-worshipers
Chanted together and side by side that girls must be married off before they know a thing,
Thus one must roll up one's sleeves and dispatch girls to the house of fortune and misfortune,
Saeed, you spineless wretch, do you not wish to reclaim your honor?
Do you not wish to be delivered from this house-wrecking disgrace?
Go and cobble together a husband for your daughter,
One must humble oneself before everyone, one must bring oneself and that unfortunated girl down to ignominy before all, one must bow low to everyone so that perhaps someone
May be found to cleanse this stain of disgrace from our skirt,

One must be grateful to her husband; indeed, perhaps Saeed even kissed that man's hands,
Even if the man were a widower or even if he wished to possess her as his second wife, one must kiss the hands of this exalted husband; if a man is found who steps forward as her primary and official husband, one must pave his path with gold for showing such chivalry and grandeur,
Oh mad phallus-worshipers, oh madmen of the world, have you demanded virginity from them as well?
He who has had and has a woman of his own, or in your view did that chivalrous man touch no other, did not caress, because like you he did not tear another's flesh?
All these things are of no account, and one must consign them all to the winds of oblivion,
One must pursue that which restores one's brow, one must make phone calls and hawk the girl's humiliation to friends and acquaintances,
Cast her into the dust and slay her in blood before her new master,
Saeed, Mahboub wishes to sell this bloody body, which you have beaten to a bloody pulp with fists and kicks,
Perhaps you will reap a greater price in exchange,
I am weary, oh breath, take your hands off me, let me sleep in peace
And see nothing, but since you will not release me so easily,

Then let me go to that very rooftop, let me wander and roam in that air for a little while,
Let me soar naked into the sky,
Where are you, oh sanctuaries of my soul, where are you, oh life of the beloveds of my world,
Where are you, my precious little yellow ducks, who has slain you?
They are selling you off in ignominy and plundering you, these people are masters of the entire world,
They have been taught that they are masters,
And they wage war against one another in their mastery, they sell me and buy me too, these people have bought and sold everything,
They are the masters of the world of others, and others are the masters of their world,
Oh life of my world, oh beloved of my universe, open your arms
So I may abide in your embrace for a little while, for a lifetime my masters, these jailers of my world, these countless Mahboub Khatouns
Were masters of my soul, and now they have come to seek a new master for me and sell me to him,
I desire a breath of air, I desire a breath of life, I seek refuge in your embrace,
And do not withhold this peace from me,
Yet it has been a long time since they tore you apart as well,

Nothing remains of you either, and now in this air I am once again accompanied by an ocean of eternal loneliness and solitude,
I wish you were here for me so that by embracing you I might distance myself a little from their world,
I know, now I know full well that these madnesses have no place in your world; even if you embraced out of instinct, even if you tore at each other in pain, you did not etch it into script and you remained averse to the game,
Yet you embraced tenderness, and I beheld tenderness in your world, you taught that one can love and cherish far away from this phallus-worship,
I sought all my knowledge in your embrace: seeing you, Holding you, abiding in your embrace; when the lover is not, the beloved too shall not be,
He spreads his wings in memory of his companion's wings, pecks in memory of her beak, and peacefully lays his head down in memory of her, never to rise again,
Their hell is their distant promised land upon the earth,
Arisen upon the earth to draw everyone into the maw of this worship of death and suffering,
These phallus-worshipers have built a world brimming with ruse and houris upon the earth, and now they wish to tear apart whoever stands in their path,
Saeed, go forth and kneel before everyone,

Kiss the hands of the widowed men, urge them to lift this stain of disgrace from your forehead, go and care nothing for me and my world, sell me, abased and lowly, to their market into their ownership,
Mahboub, be happy, you tore me asunder and consumed me, and now ratify this ownership to the new master,
You were master and ruler, now decree that another be my master,
Now ratify his decrees and surrender me to another so that you may scoop back the water that has flowed past your stream,
Amir, you too plunge into the world of these people and become one with them,
For they have forged a future for you in their own image,
Perhaps you will become a Saeed and languish, perhaps you will become a Mahboub and reign as ruler, but the entire world has been fashioned for you in advance,
Side by side, tongue to tongue, generation to generation, these people learn so that all may prostrate themselves before a great phallus
And worship this endless sacredness, this condition of being rule-maker and ruled, this state of remaining master and owner, and this ignominy,
Praise the phallus, for the phallus is the symbol of mastery over the peoples of the world,

The worship of this exalted being stands before your eyes—
either worship him or remain in dust and blood,
Yet the call of my heart, tenderness upon my soul, my loving gaze, my exalted animal nature proclaims to me that the world can be re-created and enlivened anew through tenderness, without worship and without remaining in the dust,
To love once again and make the world love once more, thus I live in the hope of your beating so that I may make you my very self.

CHAPTER 7

ARAM

She sat quietly on the rooftop, continually murmuring incomprehensible sentences under her breath, reviewing her entire life in her mind, and gazing out at her uncertain future. Marriage to someone she had never even seen once; marriage to a man who had divorced a wife or whose wife had died long ago; marriage to a man who had taken a wife before, and she would have to fight for years to possess this man—a man the mere thought of whom drove her mad. Every time, she saw herself as a commodity put up for auction: Where is the best buyer, and when will he arrive? Perhaps among all these large and small buyers, a single young man would step forward who had both a good

appearance and a respectable fortune. This customer is a good customer! But then she asked herself once more: Where is tenderness (*mehr*)? In this profitable equation and transaction, has any place been considered for affection and love?

Again, she had to scold herself and banish all these thoughts from within her. She must not think about such matters. She was a commodity for display; she had been put up for auction for sale, and she must choose a husband for herself according to their laws and their judgment of what was good and bad. Let her owner come forward; from now on she would have a new master, she would become another's honor, and this wheel of fortune would turn. Mahboub would strip away this ancient silk and hand it over to the new master with a signet ring, so that from then on, he could possessively speak to Aram, issue commands, drive forward whatever he desired, and their ashen world would continue.

"This girl is your bondwoman."

"This boy is your slave."

Bondmen and bondwomen enslaved to the ownership of fathers and mothers, while a god in the skies ruled over them all. Every time, a new master steps forward and mounts the backs of the lowly. The man becomes the owner, and submissive women will do whatever he commands because he has ordered it. After a while, the women—turned into bondwomen in chains and slavery—have set their minds on

finding a slave for themselves. The world will spin to their liking, and they will produce a slave.

Mahboub brought forward her purchased slave to auction her off among human beings, turned toward the crowd, and shouted:

"O people, this is my slave! I spent my whole life raising her; I poured all my youth into her and setting her straight. Her father granted me ownership of her. She bore the burdens of others all her life so that we might nurture her thus, and now I am her rightful owner."

The crowd, who prostrated themselves before a giant phallus, nodded in confirmation toward Mahboub and worshipped the phallus-worshiping world's greatness.

Mahboub spoke at length once more:

"O creatures, I have brought this bondwoman forward to surrender her ownership to one of you for a higher price. Who desires this heavenly houris?"

The crowd of phallus-worshipers grew ecstatic and surrounded Mahboub and Aram. Mahboub continued:

"She has a body like crystal, white of color."

It was after uttering this sentence that she tore the clothes from Aram's body and displayed her naked before the gaze of the phallus-worshipers.

"O people, have you seen her grown breasts?"

The phallus-worshipers were whetting their teeth, water dripping from their mouths.

Mahboub reached out, grabbed Aram's genitalia, and shouted:
"O people, this genitalia has rarely remained in blood. No one has touched her, and until now no one has either touched her or seen her. But today, for the sale of this bondwoman, I have shown her to you. Is there anyone who will take ownership of this bondwoman for a price?"
"I have brought you the signet, the ring, and the silk of her ownership. Whoever desires this heavenly houris, let him come forward."
The phallus-worshipers stared at her madly and caressed her body with their gazes. Everyone tore at her genitalia, bit into her breasts, and abandoned her to blood. But Aram went mad right there on that rooftop. She stood up, cast the whole world away from herself, and had lost her mind. She saw everything; she even sat watching the marketplace for the sale of bondwomen. She had gone mad; she knew nothing of this world and did not wish to know. All the phallus-worshipers were before her. She looked back, saw the corpses of the marked yellow ducks on the ground, sighed, and stepped forward once more. She recited the dirge of her pains to herself:
*O tenderness (*mehr*), I remained far from touching you,*
O love, I remained far from inhaling your scent.
Rip open this rotted soul of mine, for they seated promiscuity within my soul.

Aram climbed onto the small roof, onto the rooftop, stripped off her clothes one by one, and gazed naked at the phallus-worshipers. Then she shouted:

"This is my naked body! This is my being and my whole soul! This is everything that is within me!"

Everyone came out of their houses and saw Aram naked on the rooftop. Once more the whispers were heard:

"Immodest! This girl is a whore."

"Shamelessness to what degree!"

"Woe upon us, it is the end of times!"

The phallus-worshipers spoke, and Aram said to them:

"My naked body, which your whole world was centered upon; my grown breasts, which your dreams resided within; the genitalia in my blood, which your thoughts dwelled upon all your life; and this naked body of mine, wherein your honor, chastity, grandeur, and glory lay—all are before you now."

The phallus-worshipers saw her; they saw her naked body and spoke once more, hearing thousands of echoes.

Mahboub saw, Saeed was there, Anvar stepped forward, Amir was called, and one and all, agitated by the shamelessness and the waters gone past the millstream, stared at Aram's naked body.

Then Aram, while murmuring an incantation under her breath, poured gasoline over herself and set herself on fire.

She set the whole world on fire; the world burned and turned to ashes. And Aram, quietly, under her breath, chanted:
Your world's disgrace was cleansed,
The unchaste genitalia turned to dust.
At the sound of Aram's incantation—the world burned and suffering in its soul—a new life arose, and thousands called to themselves, called to others, and raised a lament. Sad and depressed, it sprouted and budded once more, stepped forward and renewed itself, calling the thousands to themselves and making them sprout anew, so that they might recognize tenderness (mehr), nestle in love, begin anew, and adorn a new human being.

Āvā

Yet Āvā did not set herself ablaze; she did not climb to the rooftop to stand before the phallus-worshipers and speak to them of a world built from the degradation of the flesh, she was upon that very rooftop when she sought a new path within herself, formed a new thought, and willed to build a world far removed from the world of Mahboub and the devotees of Mahboub.

Yes, she was upon that very rooftop when she suddenly sprang forth and went out, donned her garments, and put on the armor of battle so as to escape the world of their madness; she fled, she sought to forge a world far beyond their diseased realm, but the world belonged to them, they

had taken root everywhere, wherever Mahboub was, thousands like Mahboub and her minions lay in wait.
She had no food, no place to lie before her, she had nothing before her; thus, a great multitude who had grown for long years in abasement and humiliation stepped forward, they came to reclaim their right from the world,
thousands throughout all these prior times and in distant places had bought and sold them into bondage, they had masters and they burned and made peace with the ambition of being masters, until an Āvā appeared before them and they saw themselves as masters over her. The concubine stood before them,
you want food, you have no place to sleep, your master stands before you, sell your soul and take a master unto yourself.
The phallus-worshipers bestowed masters upon the world and each time increased the value of this mastery over them, each time weaving thousands of tales for them so that they might outdo one another in this ownership and lordship over others. Thus, they became the rightful masters of the world, and now that a helpless, wingless concubine stood before them, the masters advanced and cast her into chains, one through her need for bread, one through her need for status, one through the power of the blade and wrath against her, and one through deceit and guile. Each one became the master of her flesh and tore her soul apart, sank their teeth

into her swollen breasts and rent them, drank her blood, and, more lustful than ever before, bowed down in worship before the sacred phallus of the world.
Her bloody genitalia lay before them; for the first act of tearing, what sums have they paid, what teeth have they sharpened, what buying and selling have they done, what violations have they committed, and what shame have they left upon the world from the name of this torn soul of the world, from this human being lower than any baseness of the ages, from this diseased biped in the autumn of Āvā?
What has become of you? What has befell you, Āvā?
Is your genitalia soaked in blood and your breast severed?
Āvā, are you alive?
Do you hear my voice? Āvā, what have they done to you, oh my withered soul? What became of your lovely laughter? What became of your distant dreams? What became of the holding of hands? What became of that tenderness, that love, and that serenity?
Āvā, what became of your precious soul? Āvā, you gave your life in the blood of your bleeding phallus and bade farewell to the world; with your severed breast, Āvā, you summoned death unto yourself.
Āvā, they tore your soul apart and left you sitting in blood. They sold you too; they severed your maidenhead with their teeth and left you sitting in your blood.
Āvā, are you alive?

Say that you are alive, say that they did not kill you.
Your desire was that they should tear you and slay you, but they did not kill you, they left you behind. Āvā, do not speak thus, do not be this way with yourself; what have they done to you that you have preferred death over it?
Alas, Āvā, do not say that these diseased men still make you their master,
do not say that each time they sharpen their teeth to possess you and fall upon each other, do not say that they buy and sell you over and over.
Āvā, do not say that these men have made you a harlot.
They cast you into soil and blood, and now they boast of this mastery over the world and its people, and they live.
Āvā, these men are phallus-worshipers; these men have worshiped the phallus, these men are drowning in lust, these men are in need of worship, in need of possession, these men are stranded in bondage and servitude.
Alas, Āvā, these men buy countless bodies every day, they become masters, the lords of tearing apart blood and soul boast of one another, and in their lustful imagination they fancy they have tasted pleasure.
If only you were here, Āvā, to read to them once more; if only you could make these madmen understand that the loving touch of a hand is pleasure, that seeing with love is pleasure, that breathing in another with love is pleasure. If only you, Āvā, would recite to these madmen once more, if only you

would walk side-by-side with Ānā and chant of love to the phallus-worshipers upon that rooftop.

Yes, Āvā, I know, I know everything; I know your hatred of love, I know all the licentiousness of the world, and I have understood it all, I have grasped it all. I know this hatred for affection and loving embraces, that the end of the world is promiscuity; I know they whispered into your ears so much, they called everyone fickle and wanton until everyone became fickle and wanton, I know it all. But if only, Āvā, you would chant of love into the embrace of Ānā, if only you would nurture these madmen, these phallus-worshipers, with tenderness and summon a fresh world back upon the world once more.

What can I say of those public squares, of the enslaved and chained concubines, of those brought forth to be sold, of the humiliated slaves who have come to picture themselves as owners and lords? From the buying and selling of souls, from the tearing of breasts and genitalia, nay, far beyond that, from the tearing of the soul itself—what can I say? From all these years and from the infinite multitudes of the Āvās: Āvā, their world is ugly and drenched in ugliness, yet you are beautiful, with the beauty of all your pure emotions in those distant realms; you are beautiful with the beauty of those hands intertwined, you are beautiful with the beauty of that very body and gender that softly spoke to the flesh and called upon love—call upon love through its voice and warn these

madmen against buying, tearing, and lingering in blood, awaken these phallus-worshipers from their shrouding in winding-sheets and burial in the earth, and begin anew.

Āydā

Āydā lowered her head before Mahboub Khatoun and took to heart every word she uttered,
recounting the memory of that day over and over—that day when a company of people came as guests to appraise her soul, before whom she lifted a tray of tea and circled the room. The buying woman, the master's mother, spoke up:
"She has breasts worth biting into."
The master's sister called out, "Has anyone ever seen the girl's genitalia?"
Clearing her throat, Mahboub said:
"What talk is this? She has never seen the sun or the moon; she does not even know the meaning of the phallus and genitalia."

Then the phallus-worshipers laughed together, and Āydā wept. They gazed upon her body; the boy's mother stepped forward and inspected Āydā's teeth to ensure none were decayed or ruined, ran a hand over her breast, felt it callously, and said to herself that she could nurse countless children.

Even the dead woman's son cast his eyes upon her body and imagined her in his bed; whether he had divorced his wife, whether she was dead, whether perhaps she awaited them at home, or whether he had no wife at all—though the pain differed for each of the Āydās—still the man pictured her upon the couch, and the master stepped forward.

Āydā curled into herself upon the couch, pulling the quilt to her mouth as the man with his phallus splashed blood upon her genitalia and tore her breasts. Āydā, awash in blood, wept tears into the blood and relived how they had long ago given the seal of approval to her virginity, how a assembly of medical practitioners had laid hands upon her genitalia, opened her legs, and examined her, seen the hymen, and rushed out shouting to claim their reward from the others. They revelled, shouting and laughing, but Āydā wept over and over.

They had taken her for an examination once, and now in this night of blood and bloodshed, the presence of the masters' mother was unnecessary, and the newly made master turned a girl into a woman all by himself. He rejoiced once more,

saw blood, and shouted in triumph, but Āydā wept once again.

Life passed; every night Āydā was taken to the chamber, and phallus and genitalia were bared to one another. The man was ugly—or perhaps he was handsome? Stately—or perhaps short? He had a fleshy, sagging body, or was he muscular and mighty? All was in ruins, and Āydā loathed him. Tenderness had no place; affection had taken up residence in distant lands, and nothing flowed between them. Yet no one knew anything, and for no one was there any talk of tenderness and affection; only Āydā was left to take everything into her ears and soul and repeat it. She had to submit—she was a purchased slave, she had to weep, she had to burn in blood and utter no sound, for slaves were not even worthy of speech.

Every night he laid his phallus upon her genitalia and she wept; every night she surrendered her swelling breasts without tenderness to another's teeth, and each time sold herself to her master in lovelessness. No one saw a thing, and no one wished to see that in the world of the phallus-worshipers, tenderness is the most worthless of values.

She was a slave whose master had ravaged her for years, possessing nothing of the world; thus she lusted after mastery, hoping that perhaps tomorrow she would have a daughter and could utter a new Āvā once more, perhaps she would put her up for sale as a master would, perhaps she

would do unto her what Mahboub had done unto her soul, perhaps she saw the entire world in the light of her own mastery and strove to attain it—yet perhaps her world took another path.

Āydā went and bestowed her affection upon another; she went to experience love with another, perhaps she sought to find love in another's embrace, perhaps she fell in love and placed her hand in another's hand, but she had a master from times before, and the master ravaged her. Perhaps he pelted her with stones and a tempest of curses fell upon her soul; perhaps she became infamous and disgraced among all people; perhaps she had only gone in search of tenderness, yet she fell once again into the snare of promiscuity and was labeled a harlot once more—and perhaps she wished to be a harlot.

Perhaps they whispered promiscuity into Āydā's ears so often that she made promiscuity her trade; perhaps she went to the thousands and lay with them—not out of any need for money, nor harboring any thought other than wanting to make the phallus-worshipers understand that she was truly a harlot. Perhaps she drowned so deeply in the ocean of being called a harlot that she surrendered herself to the storm of promiscuity.

Her genitalia stepped forward and summoned everyone to lay hands upon her genitalia, to squeeze her breasts; perhaps she had lived so long without tenderness that she submitted

without tenderness to whoever stood before her, perhaps she turned to harlotry to thumb her nose at the world of phallus-worshipers, perhaps she made herself a harlot to realize the accusation, to content herself with the meager comfort that the accusation was true.

Āydā did everything; she went to a man's bed unwillingly, placed her breast to her child's mouth and offered that very breast to the man of the street. She abandoned her children and surrendered herself to the snare of promiscuity; she became a harlot the likes of which no one had ever seen. She was a destroyer of homes; she went to other men, intoxicating everyone with her genitalia using the weapon of her breasts, tempting married men so that all remained trapped in this harlotry. They called her a harlot, and she sought to make the world harlot-ridden.

Āydā had a long, long history, and her end stretched out across immense expanses.

Yet Āydā, if only you would remember the distant things for even an instant,

if only the taste of tenderness remained in your memory, if only you remembered how you were brought back to life by that feeling, if only you would cast aside this shameful garb of phallus-worship and find your true self, if only you would send back this disgrace heaped upon you and push this veil aside!

Āydā, if only you would strip bare once more and return to the rooftop,
this time chanting of purity for yourself and for everyone in this madness who has surrendered to promiscuity. I know, they would brand you, they would call you mad, but deep within their minds they would recall those very hands, they would remember the purity of their souls, they would know that this soul is meant for love, meant to mingle with him. They would rouse themselves and share their souls with love—alas, how they would become one in each other's embrace, crying out as a single body and banishing the world far from the phallus-worshipers! They would be masters no longer, and they would bear children as equals; no slave would stand before them, for their souls would have broken free into what they themselves had yearned for.
Āydā, I know; I know all your pains, and I know this harlot-phantasy born of the harlot-believers, yet you shall live by tenderness still, if your own soul so wills.
Purity belongs to you, if you but believe in the power of tenderness—arise from the uncoffined grave and step forward so that a new world may rise up, far from the phallus-worshipers and anchored in the heart of tenderness and love.

Almā

Yet on that day and upon that rooftop, Almā vowed to herself to remain forever removed from their lust-ridden world; she wove a cocoon of solitude around herself to stay far from everything and everyone, slaying love in her heart right beside lust and bringing herself back to life. Henceforth, she saw every world mapped out by the phallus-worshipers purely through the lens of lust, and she refused to be defiled by it.

Almā slew everything; every clasp of hands she interpreted through their definition of lust, growing to detest lust itself. The entire world was sheer abhorrence to her, and she saw distancing herself from the universe as her only salvation.

Nothing remained between them—neither tenderness took root in her heart nor lust; she recognized neither love nor pleasure, remaining imprisoned in the snare of a meaningless world. She translated everything as flight; she grew disgusted with everyone, stayed far from everything in the world, and rebuilt herself within a realm of hatred. She drifted further and further away, withdrawing from the entire world.

She stood upon her own feet, and in this withdrawal from the world of the phallus-worshipers, she became whatever was imagined far from them. Perhaps she studied, perhaps she worked, enlisting everything within her soul solely to keep away from their realm, solely to map out a world far removed from theirs, devoting her entire being to this single desire. Almā was alone; she survived in solitude, lonelier than the entire world, and grew tall in isolation. She matured, purging everything from her own universe, labeling all things a shameful and silenced brand, and banishing her breasts from her memory. She buried her genitalia, piling earth upon it, surrendering herself to the soil and continuing life as one buried alive.

Almā possessed nothing of the world save for a self that was buried alive; Almā lived on alone, companionless and breathless, dwelling each day upon desires far removed from tenderness and affection. She had neither husband nor tenderness nor affection; she desired neither to bear children

nor to live, her sole wish being to pass through existence with a body left behind in the earth and entombed.

Almā lay in the soil, with only her head remaining above ground, and lived in that very guise and countenance, far from whatever the world had pictured for her. She lived lonelier and more isolated than ever before; perhaps she triumphed, perhaps she imaged the world beyond them, but she had slain tenderness in her heart, and thus she breathed while buried alive.

She did not live, for she preferred death; she wanted no lover, she wanted to love no one, she wanted neither to nourish her soul with tenderness nor to be quickened by love—surviving solely for the sake of death was her goal.

Lonely Almā, how is your world in these days?

Does anything of those days linger in your memory? Do you remember anyone from those distant realms? Do you recall that childhood friend?

Do you remember his hands beneath the desk?

Have you ever whispered the speech of your hands to your ears?

Nothing remains of those times in your memory; I know you turned everything into hatred, you called everything hatred, and each day you drifted further and further from what they fashioned for you. I know nothing of that era remains in your memory.

Yet Almā—or is it Āydā?—have you forgotten the flour-dusted boy as well?
Have you not welcomed him into your world with all his gazes?
Have you forgotten the one who cast his eyes upon you and made you fall in love with a look?
Have you forgotten him too?
That pure sentiment of tenderness was likewise twisted into lust for you, and they pictured everything through those very genitalia and phalthus, and you accepted it all blindly and deafly.
Āydā, do you remember the ducks?
Have you forgotten those who rested peacefully in your embrace with tenderness?
Did they interpret even that as lust, and did you accept it blindly and deafly?
Āydā, I know pain has made its nest in your soul; I know you lived in agony, buried alive, yielding your soul and passing through existence in a living death.
With their death, your entire world died; they were not alive for you to reclaim yourself through their love, to resurrect yourself anew. If only you had given ear to their gentle call and sought life alongside them once more, if only you had hearkened to their loving whisper, if only you had seen that from the death of one, another sank into soil and blood, taking on her shape and perishing in that very spot so as to

continue with her, to be with her, and to live side by side far from gender and body—to be born in tenderness! If only you had seen them.

Ānā

Yet whatever you did not see, Ānā beheld; she observed everything. From days of old, she answered not the lust-tainted voice of these madmen, but the call of her own soul. Ānā came to life, stood once more upon her feet, and forged herself far from the world of such men.

She was born amidst the lust-worshipers, living in the heart of this very phallus-worshipping throng, dwelling in the same house and with the same Mahboub, yet she beheld another world whose cry had sprung from the depths of her soul. She hearkened to the call of loving hands beneath the benches, she opened her arms so that the yellow ducks might nestle in her heart, she experienced love with them, and through the gentleness of her hands and the softness of their bodies, her flesh called unto life once more.

She gazed upon her own tender hands, and with their serenity she breathed life into another, besought soul, and was born again through the spirit.

Ānā recognized her own body and became the first to love her own self; she neither viewed the flesh as a harlot nor stained the soul with shame, blame, and disgrace.

She adorned her swelling breasts so that one night she might place them to her child's mouth and learn love from the infant's suckling; she interpreted the hand as tenderness and at times stroked the faces of the afflicted, at times breathed life into the countenance of love, and at times nested within the bodies of the ducks.

She deemed not her bloody genitalia impure, and with bared genitalia before the love to which her whole soul was pledged, they became quietly one body, waking softly to mutual embrace and giving meaning to the world through the radiance of their souls.

Ānā adorned her entire body, growing ever more beautiful—so beautiful that through her beauty the world itself might grow fair, and through her tenderness, affection, love, and loving communion, the universe might blossom into a garden.

All her life she fought against every ugliness before her; all her life she stood firm and bowed not her head. Whatever baseness and harlotry they imputed to her could not make her a harlot, and pure of soul she mingled with him who was

the sole love of her era, with him in whose gaze she had sought love.

Perhaps she spent her whole life bestowing tenderness and affection upon others; perhaps she donned armor of steel to stand against the madmen intoxicated by contempt and the phallus-worshipers.

She spoke unto their world, she cried out, and delivered all from this shame-stained realm.

Have you heard the sound of her crying out? Have you heard how Ānā shouted:

"O phallus-worshipers, this body and soul are a fountain of tenderness and affection! These hands nurture warmth and have bestowed affection upon the afflicted! This burgeoning breast has shared its life at the infant's mouth and shall quicken him anew! This genitalia left in blood is not bloody, is no longer in blood, and has come to unite two bodies so that the world may be nurtured by love! This body is not a place of shame, but a source of love and affection!"

Ānā stepped forward, donning the garb of battle to confront every madman; she stood before Mahboub, Sa'id, and Amir, proclaiming her love ever louder to all. She rose to battle so as to claim from the world her right to a single life and to embrace the one she loved. She embraced that love, those gazes, and those hands, and in his arms she lived once more.

Many stood before her; Anvar came forth and branded her a harlot, but Ānā answered her with her pure, bared body,

stripping her naked flesh before her and revealing the secret of these tender hands, of the life-giving breasts, of the genitalia that binds soul and love.

Anvar fell silent and spoke no more. Mahboub shrieked, having come to sell her in the town square among the other concubines and to hang this yoke of servitude upon her neck, but Ānā shattered the chains. She descended to the cellars and, with her tender-bodied, suffering soul, overturned everything in the marketplace, teaching all the concubines that they lived but once, calling upon everyone to fall in love with themselves, to love their own selves first, to prize their own body and soul, and to deem themselves supreme and peerless.

Slaves, concubines, and bondsmen cast off their yokes; they embraced one another and kissed their own suffering bodies, which had been stained by the thousands with the brand of the madmen. They washed themselves—not this time with bodies drenched in blood and minds clouded by nothingness, but this time washing their brains, beginning afresh and anew.

Ānā stood before all—before every omniscient sage—listening to whatever was said and standing firm against it. Whatever they called base, she revealed in its purity and pressed forward. Whoever stood in her path stepped aside, for Ānā had come to love her own self, and through self-love to summon others unto tenderness. She was a lover,

enamored of all who dwelt in the world; gender was absent, and naught of the world mapped out by those others remained in the balance.

Perhaps Ānā loved a man, perhaps she beheld love in the soul of a woman, perhaps love and its epiphany resided within the soul of an animal—nothing stood between them save tenderness and love, which had nested within her entire soul; thus she was solely a lover, heedless of who stood before her, believing solely in the power of love.

Perhaps she became one body with the flour-carrying boy, perhaps they folded into one another's embrace, perhaps they became a single flesh, kissing each other's bodies, knowing the beauty of their own form and delighting in the beauty of the other's. In that embrace, when they were as one, a child arose from their union.

Ānā wept, she cried; the boy wept too and cried, for from their love another had arisen, another had come forth who was their entire world. In tenderness they pressed the child to their breasts, shedding tears of joy. Ānā bared her breast—oh, how she prided herself upon those swelling breasts, oh, how she gloried in her genitalia, how proud she was of this boundless love—and gently she placed her breast to her infant's mouth. He suckled, and Ānā loved all the more, soaring higher and ascending into the heavens.

Ānā made all things love, and became herself a lover. At times she stroked a dog's face, praising the purity of its soul;

how exalted and sublime she was, the very embodiment of love and affection! These others declared every vestige of tenderness to be impure, while Ānā praised every vestige of tenderness.

The ducks grew tall beside her, waxing ever larger; her child grew tall and matured. She spoke to him of his sublime body, of this precious soul that stands as the highest value in the universe. Each day she read to him, each day teaching him the lesson of emancipation, whispering into the child's ear that he had come into the world but once and beheld this earth but once.

He must dream, he must fulfill his dream, he must live on by the path of his desire.

Each day in the embrace of her child, Ānā spoke to him of his pure body, chanting into his heart of this sublime worth, telling him time and again how with this pure body he could multiply tenderness, evoke loves, and turn the world upside down. She made him know his body and understand this pure soul.

Ānā set her child free to soar unhindered by any bonds; Ānā sat afar and watched his flight, beholding him in the skies and taking pride in herself.

She remembered naught of the past; that other world was forgotten. She chanted to herself that she would transform the world, that they would transform the entire world together, that all would see themselves anew, that all would

comprehend the soul and cleave to its supreme value upon the pure law of freedom.

Ānā flew not alone, but raised up all who stood beside her in flight, that they might begin the world anew from the very start.

AWAY

In those distant realms and ages past, where they buried infant girls alive, one arose and raised a cry of woe, shouting: "O mad, idolatrous throng, what manner of world is this that you have built, burying and slaying daughters alive within it? They must rise forth and behold the world; they must live unto existence!" And in obedience to her command, so they did.

Yet it was not long before she gained power, yielded her neck in obedience, and submitted to the bonds of God. She and all the world fell captive to the grip of power, sacrificing every goodness to themselves, convinced that the world was thus and forever would remain.

Power stood at the forefront, bringing all into bondage; whosoever spoke did homage as a slave and bowed low before it. Even she who had spoken against the burying of daughters alive bent her knee to the lust of power and did as all others do, did as humanity has ever done, did as is alive in the very essence of everyone.

Lust-driven, swayed by the lure of power, she resolved to devour all things to sate her own desire. This is the living custom of humankind, the custom of this lowest of the low. She took possession of everything, advanced as a master, and claimed women as her own—the very ones who used to slaughter daughters alive. She took delight in all, beheld everyone through the lens of lust, pictured all within her own embrace, and revelled once more in this nurturing of harlotry.

All became harlots, all remained trapped at her mercy. After a time, she commanded that the unseemly visage be veiled, that this wanton body be hidden from the gaze of others. She thrust them into sacks, led them to the inner chambers, drew the multi-layered curtains, and barred all others from this

mastery, while teaching them the art of mastery so that they might bow before this Kaaba of theirs.

A time had passed when the shrouds were brought forth—the very shrouds in which daughters had been buried and laid in the earth so they might draw breath no more.

They pulled forth the shrouds and summoned the women.

The shrouds were donned, the women stepped forward.

Every day a new command arose, every day the mesmerising power advanced, consuming all within its law and pressing onward.

Time had passed, a long time had passed—or perhaps it was so from the very beginning—that the shrouded women no longer died buried alive in the world, but lived instead.

This time, the women were condemned to life wrapped in shrouds.

These are the women buried alive upon the earth.

For a long time they worshipped power; at times they praised savagery and barbarism, at times they bowed before gold and might, and now they surrendered to the phallus. This throng bowed down in worship before the exposed phallus across the world, inviting upon themselves greater degradation day by day at the feet of this holy relic. Yet, alas, their entire world was a contradiction; so deeply were they drowned in this madness, so wearied by this attrition, that each time they drove themselves in their confusion into the depths of a well dug with their own hands. They buried everyone in a

well named "life." First the women were entombed within this well, and the men gazed on in gladness at their living death; and after a time, the men too were dragged to the bottom of the well, and all alike remained stranded in the maw of such a venerable disgrace—all lived a buried, dying death.

The phallus-worshipping the living-buried stood forth, heaping ever more disgrace upon their own heads. Everything turned to shame; their soul, their body, their genitalia and phallus—all struck the earth in disgrace, submitting to whatever was ordained for them.

These surrendered ones became disgrace itself, bowing before that disgrace. They lay buried in a grave they had dug for themselves, pressing ever deeper into this madness.

The desire was to become the master; the dream and craving was to remain the owner. They were steeped in humiliation and advanced through humiliation. Vengeance was their primary value, and out of this vengeance for a self left behind in the grave, they sought retribution. The masters boasted over the slave, forging an endless circle wherein all became slaves. At the very apex of this pyramidal lordship sat power, and to remain within this pyramid, all became master and slave alike.

The humiliated humiliated others; the notion of harlotry became the fashion. They became harlots, were branded fickle and wanton, and in the end, all sank entirely into their

pre-assigned roles. And now, the countless throng of shrouded, harlot-deemed women, and the bared-body throng of un-shrouded, self-buried women, have each called themselves harlots, doing whatever it takes to prove that they are indeed harlot-souled and fickle.

The phallus-worshipers bow in disgrace and blame before the great phallus of the world, paying homage to this ugliness, marching closer to death day by day in this living burial. Yet one must arise, one must begin anew! Thus it is that the rebels of the world shall rise:

Rebels who have come not to uproot and demolish everything, but to re-create; come to begin afresh and anew; come to forge the soul; come to bestow the soul upon the universe; come to transfigure all values; come to tear up the roots of whatever these others have built and plant a fresh sapling in their stead.

O phallus-worshipers, behold! We have come to drag you forth from the grave. If you have bowed your heads in the grave and died a living death, enough! If you have played the harlot out of spite and mockery, enough! If you have languished in the maw of masters and plunged yourselves into blood and soil, enough! Now is the time to rise once more, now is the time to spring forth anew, now is the time to flow and become the soul.

Cast off every tattered rag and ancient veil you wear; burn them all in the fire and don a fresh garment. Become anew!

This time, be the soul. Desire naught greater or lesser than to be the soul. Let the supreme value of your world be the soul, for this is your re-creation and your triumphant emergence. Ānā cast off the shroud from her body and clothed herself in a veil of beauty. She deemed herself the soul and praised this sublime soul, praising this sole value of the universe. She knew that the highest value in the world is the soul, that naught can equal it, and she stroked her own body, feeling no shame for her genitalia, her swelling breasts, her hands, her hair, or anything dwelling within her soul, but glorying in them all.

O living-buried phallus-worshipers, the hour of your emergence from the graves you have built is at hand. We must rise from the earth, sprout forth, begin anew, and nurture our roots.

We must rise afresh and ascend to the heavens, welcoming the skies with the fresh worth of our souls, shattering whatever was built in days of old—for all those roots lay sunk in a mire. We must seek the soil, and this time neither bury ourselves within it nor linger unburied in a worldly grave, but rather raise our roots from brand-new values and hail a newborn world.

In the hope of building a world as vast as the soul, wherein dwells the meaning of freedom.

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