

Mist Over Peace

Zeena Nackerdien

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Dedication

To my friends and family.

Blessings to all the readers via the words of my late brother:

“May you see your future as filled with promise and possibility. May you find enough inner strength to determine your own worth by yourself and not be dependent upon another’s judgment of your accomplishments. May you always feel loved.”

Mogammat Fadiel Nackerdien.

Preface

Capricious weather in Africa served as the perfect metaphor for the temporal nature of relationships, illnesses, and other societal issues that may obscure the eternal quest of human beings to find meaning (synonymous with happiness) in their lives. Mist would roll over sun-kissed, emerald-green vistas dotted with homes, only to clear within an hour and repeat Nature's mysterious dance. As a South-African-born scientist, I could immediately cite a logical explanation for the weather. Instead, as a human being midway through life's ups and downs, I have synthesized relationships, headlines, mythology, history, science, religion, and sports through my mental prism into a collection of poems. Scientific discoveries and rational thought take center stage in poems such as *Inflammatory bowel disease*, *On microbes and Man*, and *Yarumel's curse*. The latter poem refers to an ongoing study currently being conducted in Colombia to assess factors contributing to early-onset Alzheimer's disease in a population predisposed to this condition. In addition, *Aging* describes memory loss accompanying advancing years.

I have also used the often-overworked metaphor of a bridge in *The Brooklyn Bridge* and *Question Bridge* to recall heroic engineering feats and to riff on a chasm of misunderstanding that may exist within a community. In the latter case, I chose the same title as a transmedia project aimed at facilitating discussions among black men. Headlines detailing violent events in South Africa, notably the *Marikana* miners' strike, and shootings in the USA formed the basis for poems such as *A miner's voice* and *Gun control*.

Finally, I have used my own background (see "About the Author" and debut novel, *The Heroine Next Door*) to elaborate on the mysteries of relationships, religion (mainly Islam), and the *zeitgeist*. A glossary has been added to guide the reader though a literary globe trot, heavily influenced by Alexander Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, Edgar Allan Poe, John Milton, Molière, and Robert Frost. References to South African anti-apartheid activists (*Amy Biehl*, *Imam Haron*, and *Tale of two cricketers*), royalty and inventors from diverse lands (*Begum*, *Black Men*, *Creativity and resilience*, and *Locust Grove*), plus a subtle nod to the Afrikaner poet, C.M. van den Heever (*The Healing Power of Time*), round out the digital journey. *Google*, in particular *Wikipedia* and *Encyclopedia Britannica*, served as my major sources of facts and inspiration.

A baby

Sensual femininity uniting with male virility,
Whether in a petri dish, by force, in anonymity or with love and fidelity,
Unwanted or wanted conception
Call it a baby, a fetus or a cruel deception
Ponder lovingly or sadly on the other
Whether Calliope or Medea
A free spirit, a rape victim, or betrothed to another,
Life growing in your womb means that you are about to be a mother
Swollen breasts and nipples distended,
Your body prepares for another soul, alien or kindred
Physical and hormonal changes,
Viewing embryonic development in an amniotic sac
Expectantly, reverently or fearfully, wanting your life back.
Body aches and stretch marks endured with support or in solitude,
Hopefully prepare to nurture a new life inspired to do good
Motherhood is not for everyone,
Depression or filicide can ruin lives before they have begun,
Or maybe it is just a choice by a conscious voice,
But when a baby makes its first noise
And you can count ten fingers and ten toes,
Pause momentarily in admiration and forget your woes.

Advice to a would-be martyr

Seeker

Dear *Khalifa*,

Should I listen to the doomsday hashtags, should I heed the tweet that brags
Of inflaming the wags, setting the Internet alight, recruiting brothers to the
fight

And ignore the teachings of our *Nabi*, and pay lip service to Islamic homily?

Should I add my rage to a Facebook page,

And ignore the invisible bonds of empathy

That glues all that is decent in humanity?

Should I balkanize nations, and fracture civilizations,

Splitting people into opposing forces?

Surely you will endorse this.

Deceit and hypocrisy

Will be replaced with hegemony and autocracy.

Khalifa

By seeking refuge in God from the *Shaitan*, His *djinn* can be found all
around,

Externally and internally, perpetuating a false dichotomy

Of favoring a glorious history, over an uncertain destiny.

But God's presence in everything

Should fill you with a sense of His omniscience.

So rewire your desire to fight fire with fire,

And make it your mission to seek education.

Remember every hour that knowledge is the ultimate power.

Embrace a vision, of physical rejuvenation and spiritual contemplation,
Of turning challenge into opportunity, of bombarding your brethren with
generosity,
Of priding yourself in ethnic or religious identity, without colliding with a
common reality.
Kun Fayakun, Manifest your destiny.

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A gardener

She bows down to weed the lawn
A gardener to the manner born
Golden skin glistening with perspiration
Giving life to greenery is her meditation.
Birds and other pollinators serenade her every motion
As she tills the soil with great devotion.
A little girl watches her seed and sow,
Fighting infestation and patiently watering every furrow.
Summer brings a floral bounty,
Ranunculus, roses, and ravishing blooms, the envy of every county,
A little girl hides in a loquat tree,
Listening to the woman cry:” I have recreated Eden.
Here I can finally be me.”
Seasons pass and years go by,
Sorrow and age slow her down and she can only sigh
As leaves turn brown and grape vines wither and die,
Leaving only memories of beauty and echoes of joy to share with every
brother,
I remember her with love, for she is my mother.

Aging

Why does aging vary with genes and environment in such mysterious ways?
Just like unknown ingredients in mortality's cocktail,
Why do we ignore the recipe and bittersweet aftertaste of our finite number of days?
Just like a monocarpic plant blooming once to regale,
We crane towards Heaven's gaze
And believe that our health will never fail.
Born more than ninety years ago in another place and raised in the USA,
You brought together people from all walks of life to partake in your vision for humanity.
So they debated and learned about the human condition every day
And were exasperated and charmed by your out-sized personality along the way.
That is why friends and family wished to be in close proximity,
Just like you, they wished that your sharp mind and essence would always keep you in the fray.
Why do you forget all that knowledge that you have gained,
As if garbled neural connections weakening the brain's armory
Have rendered moot the insights that you attained.
Just like life's precious moments are preserved in memory,
We take for granted that your shining presence would be with us for eternity.
Why does everyone now avert their gaze from your elderly gait,
And hasten their pace in life's rat race,
Afraid of what may be their fate?
Is it impatience at dealing with decrepitude?
Or a need to imbibe youth's elixir and feel the glow that we exude,
Or do we wait 'til it's too late to contemplate a soul's joy that Death cannot abate?

A Haitian in Connecticut

Bon jour, monsieur taxi-driver.

Here are my pennies and a fiver.

I hate to break your reverie,

But are you ready to deliver me to my destiny?

Long ago you were a refugee escaping calamity in Haiti,

Eager to earn a living on the streets of Connecticut.

Five years since fleeing from the western tip of an island and living in a land renowned for its glut,

You tell me stories of waking up on a dirty mattress drenched in sweat,

Desperately trying to figure out if your family in Port-au-Prince can be fed.

When the earthquake hit your home in Hispaniola,

Killing perhaps 200,000 people and flattening your home like a demonic steamroller,

The world stopped to commiserate for a second.

Humanitarian aid arrived and promises of change beckoned.

Now, after roving from Pontius to Pilate,

Your family back in Haiti sound desolate,

Expressing the mournful sentiment

That billions of dollars failed to deliver enough of the basics such as latrines for excrement.

Of course, you have every reason to remain proud and even vehement.

After all, the “Pearl of Antilles” has had to pay a heavy price for any advance,

Including blood and a fortune in cash to secure their freedom from France.

The strength of Toussaint L’Ouverture is embedded in your DNA.

Why is it then that depression and alcohol and corruption hold sway?

When the world loses interest,

It will be up to Haitians to climb the infrastructure-Everest.

So, after clucking my tongue in sympathy at your sad story,
My attention has been drawn away to a robbery at a nearby armory.
Regretfully, this is the transparent world we live in today,
Where talk is cheap, and few people care about painstakingly rebuilding a
country, come what may.

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A meditation on love

Love is a many-splendored thing

It's the chemical high that only hormones can bring

Love is symbolized in a Taj Mahal giving lovers a reason to be living

The fairy tale casting a woman as a queen and her spouse as a king

Basking in the glow of passion that cannot be ignored.

On the grounds of a Crimean Khan's palace, two lovers kissed and felt the finger of God.

When their lips touched, the lovers were certain of their bond for eternity,

Convinced that even in death a "Fountain of Tears" would serve as proof of devotion's divinity.

When their fingers touched, Heaven seemed to sing

That love is a many-splendored thing.

But what if love's constancy was eroded by illusion,

If happiness was transient and loyalty a delusion,

If the finger of God was a wrathful smoke plume trailing romantic debris.

After quarreling lovers circled each other endlessly,

And collided at a mental periastron,

Causing a psychological hypernova not predicted by any cistron,

Leaving only an emotional black hole in its wake,

And bystanders whispering that their love was fake.

If apathy, jealousy, infidelity or incompatibility crippled love on every level,

Mutating a union of lovers into a pact with the Devil,

Would they adapt and grow as love's tempo changes from allegro to larghissimo?

Or would the lovers be forever torn asunder, leaving no one to sing

That love is a many-splendored thing.