



If You to Love One of Them

Because love is as hard as a walnut in a toothless mouth,
Because you might stand for hours, as your breathy gasps burn in the frost, waiting for a rose
to whisper to you,
While you forget that time ignores women who labor neglected in kitchens,
And men withering in coffeehouses.
All that you earn to is to steal a single rosy pulse for your heart,
No chocolate bars will suffice to cheer you up,
No cartons of ice cream, and
Not even hours of seated mediation in yoga studios.
You write your son: "I'm alarmed I'll slap my exile, fearing that my hand will get sullied by
separation."
He shares your comment with his friend, and they both guffaw!
"I feel parched!"
You repeat this almost every day within earshot of your daughter, before she slams the door
and leaves.
"Sorrow chokes me."
I write down this phrase and quickly erase it, fearing that the world's serenity will be
perturbed.
For me to love you
Is as impossible as for you to be here now,
While I'm alone and repeat
In my bedroom,
In the kitchen,
While climbing the stairs,
At the door, and
On the couch,
In front of the TV,
That I'm turning into a wall so dilapidated that mirrors dread it.
Death will never die; I'm the one who always does.
My blood boils.
My fingers are live embers.
I have no whispering bed,
No gently undulating swimming pool.
Instead, I'm surrounded by snow drifts and memories of reverberating bombs,
And, when I sleep, my eyelids cling together over a dark void.
You loving one of them,
Means you must ditch your wristwatch, so it doesn't make you feel that time is evaporating
Or remind you that he is slow to respond.
You will need to dispose of your phone, so it won't upset you with its silent howl.
I really wish we had never met

And I had remained just as I was:
 Oblivious to everything happening around me,
 Needing only a piece of paper
 With which to bandage a tree struck down by the gust of a violent storm
 Or
 On which I draw a map of my country after the Emperor's fingers sliced and diced it.
 Just a sheet of paper that
 I would stuff down the neck of a bottle,
 Throw to the center of the river while I run by,
 Or cram into the crannies of my worm-eaten days.
 For you to love as I do now,
 A young man, who is only fifty,
 Whenever the pounding of his heart reaches the hem of my dress, I swallow an aspirin
 And tell him to bring me a tree.
 He's gone till the forest is stripped of verdure.
 Totally disinterested in arithmetic,
 He counts only the moments we will spend together, one day,
 When we won't be separated as we once were, when
 Clandestine meetings made us prick up our ears.
 I dream of him every day,
 But rarely find a spot for myself in the folds of his consideration of some other girl.
 I write to him:
 "My window, which looks down on you, has grown weary,
 Because the branch tips grow no closer
 Nor curl up and fall asleep."
 He laughs!
 "I love you: you!"
 Daybreak and nighttime mingle.
 Language condenses till your name belongs only to you, not anyone else.
 The long roads extend, cutting short, to you and
 Become you, who are the goal of my trip.
 I love you now like this:
 My heart needs another heart
 So, it won't dissolve, the way it did two months ago
 When your fingers approached me
 To tear from my new blouse's collar, the sales tag I had forgotten to remove!

By Faleeha Hassan

Translated by William M. Hutchins

Faleeha Hassan, born in Najaf, Iraq, in 1967, is a poet, teacher, editor, writer, and playwright now residing in the United States. As a pioneering figure, she was the first woman in Iraq to write poetry for children. She holds a master's degree in Arabic literature and has published an impressive array of 26 books. Her works have been translated into numerous languages, including English, Turkmen, Bosnian, Indian, French, Italian, German, Kurdish, Spanish, Korean, Greek, Serbian, Albanian, Pakistani, Romanian, Malayalam, Chinese, Odia, Nepali, and Macedonian.

Faleeha's contributions to literature have earned her several accolades. She was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 2018 and the Pushcart Prize in 2019. She received the Women of Excellence Inspiration Award from SJ Magazine in 2020, the Grand Jury Award at the Sahitto International Award for Literature in 2021, and the HerStory Award from the Women's Federation for World Peace New Jersey in 2024. Additionally, she has been a Cultural Ambassador for Iraq-USA since 2018 and serves as a worldwide literary advisor for PEN Craft Bangladesh.

She is a member of the International Writers and Artists Association, Who's Who in America (2023), and has served on the judging panel for the Sahitto Award in 2023. She also sat on the Women of Excellence selection committee in 2023 and received the Women in the Arts Award in the same year