

AL FATIHA



P o e m s

ABUNIC SHERIF II

al fatiha

Abunic Sherif II

poems

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for maimunah, korpo

i love you.

Allah knows i am sick in all the poems i write.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank everybody who started this journey with me. The readers of the first poems, the first comments, and the many editors who helped shape these poems into what they became. A personal Thank You to Jeremy Teddy Karn for breathing down on my neck and never giving up until this book came to live. Lastly, I would like to thank the various magazines where some of these poems were previously published.

Introduction

It was at *Malcolm and Robell's first poetry slam* I got to realize the pain Abunic Sherif II has been going through for many years. The pain he has been hiding from his friends with a smile that is always wrapped around his face.

I watched him sit in the cozy edifice of the Monrovia City Hall as he *whatsapp'd* his best friend about his pain. I saw the text of her begging him to return home. Abunic ended the program with us sitting in the audience with the brightest smile on his face but while in pain— he sat listening to poets as they read their poems. *Everything about poetry is the reason Abunic is alive and smiling.*

Abunic would give his life for the survival of poetry in Liberia and — I am so proud and humbled to introduce his first chapbook that is titled, Al Fatiha. Al Fatiha means the opening chapter of the Quran and is recited as a blessing.

It gives me so much joy of being the first reader of this miracle that has been written by a brilliant poet and a friend that is dearest to me. This chapbook is a book of prayers from a poet that has been through a lot.

This chapbook is composed of poems about what the author has been experiencing for so many years. It speaks on his sickness, his pain, and the death of those that are precious to him.

Enjoy!

*Jeremy Teddy Karn
Author of Miryam Madgalit
Paynesville City, Monrovia - Liberia*

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Author's Bio.

sojourner

your eyes won't tell the pain packed in your bones,
or the ones you carry in your heart neither will it tell
the stories of your painful journey.

there are times you watched the night— making wishes on shooting stars;
and hope life would go beyond death.

the path to the river is not always filled with prickly leaves,
but smooth as the waters behind the pills you shove down your throat.

*maybe they're onions; or maybe you're the knife doing
the cutting with wishes, looking for
the white layers under your skin*

and your eyes would never tell; the many times you cried,
because your fingers are tiny mops
that dry them every time they would flood

but your eyes don't need words, when the answer to
pain is curved at the corners of your mouth.

silent screams

these words are teardrops spilling silently from a broken cup
on nights and days when the birds would call
through seasons; warm and cold they'd fall.

these words are raging seas- too strong for sandy beaches
they come rolling, kicking and screaming
but their noise only blocks absent ears from hearing.

these words are empty emotions
they sit in the dark, drunk on pain potions
watching and counting stars in silence;
when the cells, like the moon, would shape themselves in crescent.

these words are memories as old and dusty as the ancient tapes.
they get stuck on repeat and,
play the painful soundtracks of all the nasty names.

these words are burnt out flares
they bounce, duck, and hit the grey clouds
roaming the dark skies in search for help
staining sad eyes with sticky silver tears.

these words are dark water colors on white canvases portraying dared dreams.
every stroke- an unheard cry that have forever been ringing
these words are nothing but silent screams.

paradox

i am a lost cause. A blank canvas
a colorless picture
a watery landscape
a mouth filled with oil paint.

i am a sour salt
a priceless diamond without worth
a silent scream in the mouth of a boy.

i am an unpleasant melody,
a broken guitar string on the back of its player.

a dense forest without rain
i am a drowning fish
a dried-out ocean
a compass that lacks directions
i am an open secret sealed in a box
i am a speeding snail that can't be stopped.

i am a walking paradox.

magic tricks

the lights went out and the curtains got raised
we took the stage to perform the greatest magic show
we went directly with the scripts and played our roles
i was the dark room, you were the light from the moon.

magic wands waved with wonders taking tricksters on a trip to be tricked
for our final trick, i was the rabbit or was i the hat?
i don't know, you pick

you pulled me out of the hat, but couldn't pull the hat out of me
the wands did nothing to set me free;
magic words blew like the breeze

come curtain's closure,
we became different characters
i was the dancing puppet strung along by you; the perfect puppeteer.

speaking silence

on some nights; when i stare at stars
i sit by the fire, floating
like lifeless embers in the dark

i roll my tongue in a language silence taught me
and whisper them to the winds.

there is this thing i do with silence
i fold it into tiny balls &
shove them down my throat hoping they never speak

of the screams stuck in the walls &
the demons that haunt my cell

but silence in its purest form is loud
and yearns to be spoken. on these nights
they're the loudest sounds.

squared box

every morn' in this squared box,
i lie in despair, with wide eyes and not a blink.

as the sun yawns and stretches its limbs.
my spirit once fearless,
can no longer be a fox.

when the sheets shift and tangle on my ankles
i find myself drowning in a dried-out ocean.

the sounds of brushes on teeth and tongues and gaggles
keeps me in inertia, dreading motion.

every morn' in this squared box
as i lay dying, like the last light of the night

i dress my soul in armor for this fight
and breathe, and breathe, and breathe,
spilling my life in the souls of trees.

date

we take a trip outside the city
 you, not with me physically
me, not in reality on a highway or any moving thing.

i still go to your favorite place
 and order two cups of ice cream.

you hate the chocolate; it's dark
and reminds you of the night,

which reminds you i don't sleep easily
 which reminds you that i am depressed.

you stare at my eyes, reading insomnia.
i try to count the stars. i can't.
i hug you, my arms snake around my body,
 because you're just air.

you take up so much space:
my notebook, my thoughts, dreams and
the poems i try not to make about you.

i promise to see a doctor, tomorrow
but tonight, is about being blind
 and playing characters in a poem
let's walk and end up nowhere.

when God visits monrovia

there won't be much listening
his voice would drown over the whispers of engines & busy city happenings.

he will have to match the shouting of strangers on sidewalks
fierce fist fights between cab drivers and passengers over some change.

he'd need stronger coffee to go through a long day
he'd order shrimps and fries with cheese & eat to the stare of scrawny kids at windows
with drools dripping between their teeth.

he'd get stopped in a taxi by an officer & gasp at how he folds the twenty bucks
the driver slips him in his pockets.
he'd pick up an apple sliding to his feet and give it back to a hawker, & he'd receive
his first rolled up eyes

at night when the need to speak sits heavy in his throat like a log
he will have to be louder than my mother's prayers
she shouts in so many languages he'd struggle with which one to answer with

when it's dawn & the sun's slipping from its slumber,
he will dry himself off the roots and grasses,
sprout his wings and fly back home

and remember, this country kills gods who linger too long and dare to dream.

in memoriam

after Martins Deep

the morning you died; my brother ran like a thief with the fear of death on his trail.

i held your son's hand, cupped his tears & smeared it on my face.

in my defense, 30 minutes is too soon to have a tear when you've dried up your source.

i did *zubb'r* under the mango tree. the *masjid* crowding with the scent of grief, and death.

bodies lined the *su'afa* like matchsticks waiting to be scratched into flames.

innalilahi wa innalilahi rajiou'n.

this is another form of death- telling the body its duty to become dirt.

but what is this poem? if not an answered prayer

that the body stays rigid, even after a stroke.

march 27: tears party

i

the party starts with songs and memories of you eating eggs.

mother buries her face in onions on the kitchen table, cries,
and stuff garlic down our mouths to hide the scent of grief on our tongues.

there's a rhythm in death we only outmatch by living.

i own a body like yours that longs to live,

like the birds you drove from eating on grandmother's farm at the back of the house.

ii

you sit unseen at the table. we read the *fatiha* and leave your name in the air.
father tunes his radio searching for your voice. you've reincarnated & become water-
mother plastered our eyes so we don't spill you on the table cloth.

the party ends with 22 years of silence clinging to the ceiling.
we breathe you back from the air, & read the *fatiha*, this time; for a future loss.

a breath, every five seconds

i tried to describe this pain while you held your breath.
you breathed, once, every five seconds.

i am a surplus of genetic information, too much fear that
i spill it on myself.

i concoct your name with every *fatiha* i read- a sort of balm
i rub on my joints to numb my pain,
and it feels like breathing, once, every five seconds.

every night, when my body becomes a forest of powdery bones,
and crackles like a campfire.

i drag myself to a window, fill my lungs with air,
and start a marathon of breaths.

in longing for ghosts and endless attempts to unlearn my grief

i have carried this sickness forever, like the night sky that holds stars
and the crescent.

Allah knows i am sick in all the poems i write,
the lines curl up & point back to things in my veins.

i am learning to write from memory
the sting of needles under my skin,

the fuss with my grandmother's
herb-filled palms that bittered my tongue.

i am learning to identify myself as the moon or a member of a tribe.
i am *keiqumab*; owner of a pair of yellow eyes, & splitlips.

i am learning too, to acquaint myself with the taste of grief.
i am learning to forget the sadness in my mother's eyes when
she clutched her child to her breasts,

and the white noise on the radio that
matched the rhythm of my father's sob. i am learning to replace
the *d'ua* read at the graveyard with the one

i read before falling asleep,
so that i have a greeting for my sister when we meet.

ode to my sister

"there will always be someone who will sit God down in a dark room, and interrogate Him about his likeness, or say maybe God has sickle cell like you"

Jeremy Teddy Karn

i have watched you hate the bones in
your body

coloring them with grief, as black as last night
to bury a sickness eating the dreams off your eyelids.

the doctors told your mother to wait beside a grave.

here you are, bad at pain, & dying.

at eighteen, you've become a wildfire,

burning the bushes under your skin &
the pains sleeping on your joints.

one night you clawed words on your bedroom wall
with the crescent over each letter.

the joke was: the moon comes in half,
so, Allah must be sick, like you.

full moon

my kind worships the moon
we wear ourselves in gowns &
sing to her coded hymns
of our pains and our daily dooms.

my kind worships the moon
when she's a crescent, when she's full
in her dim light we bloom
like flowers, in shades of blue.

my kind worships the moon
our bodies are haunted shrines
the curse course our veins
sickled through the age of time.

my kind are the lone wolves
with papery bones.
we bow & turn at the sight of the moon
when she's a crescent, when she's full.

wildlings

"To me, where the wild things are; is a place that exists in our minds"

Alessia Cara

i run shirtless into the rain. i am wet &
the earth pretends it is naked & i am clothed in dark furs, like the night

under the rubber waterfalls, i dance
wet and proud. wild and free. in a rave as loud as a lion's roar.

i sing to the wind a dirge
for the pains who died on my bones
wishing they were free of me.

in my dreams happiness
is howling, singing loud & running wild free of the crescents

but i am of a tribe, silent.
bonded by blood to only dreams, &
never the tough skins of the wild things.

poem from the moment after you left

for Korpo

after Sabrina Benaim

& the truth is

i didn't cry on the sidewalk. i slipped in the taxi, choked out a greeting
the driver didn't hear & plugged my ears with j. cole's verses over the afro-pop drums.

the truth is

i faked it when you texted me from the office saying you're scared. you're leaving,
and you're scared.

i said: *'i don't even know what to say'* what i should've said was: *'hug me & let's cry together.'*

the truth is

10 minutes after you left, i felt my eyes drinking and spilling the distance laid out in asphalt
as i stare with blurry vision at the only good picture we ever took
& realized crying is another form of goodbyes.

the flow

when next you walk to this river;
sit down on the bank and wait for this circus' finest show.

take the sun that sleeps in your eyes
and stitch it back in the sullen sky.
hush the angry leaves rustling in the wind- in fear of the eerie sounds of the night.

swallow the voices of the gulls
and wear the skins of the water birds.
watch like a hawk- the fishermen mending his nets

and marvel at how rivers tend to flow
from sad eyes to happy faces.

sharing

our conversations always started at midnight. the night sky a blanket
over our heads.

two birds, four fragile wings, attempting flight into a world of uncertainties.

i held you above the heavens. this is how i fall: head first, then limbs,
flailing in the wind like the flag of
an aircraft marshall.

i don't know how to explain the flavor of your lip gloss on my breath.
my mother taught me how to share:

a poem, pictures of sunsets, a heart, & a rib. this is how i die:
blinking, like the cursor on an empty notepad,

lungs full of tears, & an image of you reading this poem stuck in my iris.

faith: an ode

after Jeremy Teddy Karn

i want to sleep in every one of your dark shades.
i am a pilgrim. you're *mecca*- a city where i rest.
i've walked deserts in thirst with your name in the cracks
of my lips.

i will pray like this: *love, faith, love, faith, love, faith*
until your heart undresses me of my traveler's robe and leads to
the path of our god.

amen.

Author's Bio.

Abunic Sherif II is a young Liberian writer and poet. He writes from a quiet room in Monrovia. His works have been published on *Eboquills literary magazine*, *Praxis magazine*, *Spillwords*, *the Ducor Review*, *Ngiga Review*, *The Shallow Tales Review*, and *The Liberian Poet Society*.