

This poem has no title,
And were it possible,
this poem would have been completely silent.

[Shhhh]

For sometimes,
words cannot contain.

Imagine, the word “Imagine.”
In Arabic, the word “imagine” means:
تخيلوا – (*takhayyalu*)
– plural

Now, تخيلوا – (*takhayyalu*),
There are more than 10 words in the Arabic language that are used to mean “prison,”
More than 10 that mean “imprisonment,”
More than 5 that mean “prisoner.”

تخيلوا – (*takhayyalu*),
that he has known the taste of every synonym,
has had every vowel and consonant grow under his skin and underneath his fingernails,
has had his ribcage crushed into with every enunciated letter,
his heart in sync with the violence resounding with every bat and beat of sound of each word,
his tongue tied off of every utterance.

He has known حبس (*Habis*) and سجن (*Sijin*) and معتقل (*Mo'taqal*)
He has been محبوس (*Mahbus*) and مقيد (*Moqayyad*) and معتقل (*Mo'taqal*)

Now,
تخيلوا – (*takhayyalu*), the no more.
No more of the what and the who and the whom you love.
No more of the what and the why and the how you do.
No more of you.

تخيلوا – (*takhayyalu*), a place – other,
a no-place, a non-place, a place
– suspended
A space, not yours.

Do not imagine a cell,
Do not imagine its bars and gates and doors and surveillance cameras,
Imagine,
]a lung press[

Do not imagine chains, or shackles, or humiliation, or degradation, or loneliness –

Do not imagine the alone –

Do not imagine fear and terror, and sleeplessness and depression.

Do not imagine submission

– involuntary submission.

Do not imagine claustrophobia, or other phobias, or other

– still,
be still.

Do not imagine imprisonment.

Do not imagine waiting,

And time and waiting,

And verdict and waiting.

Do not imagine that your death sentence has been overruled and that instead of a sigh of any relief,

you're still waiting.

Your breath – suspended

Your life – suspended

Your heart – suspended

Your mind – anything but suspended

Your new sentence suspended and you're still waiting.

Imagine – waiting.

But

Do. Not. Make. Art. Out. Of. This.

Instead, تَخَيَّلُوا – (*takhayyalu*),

Do not imagine guards, or batons, or guns.

Do not imagine tasers or lashes

– or lashes

– or lashes

Do not imagine what day is, what day it is,

Do not imagine night, or how night is,

Do not imagine time or what it stands for.

Do imagine, تَخَيَّلُوا – (*takhayyalu*),

A word hung loose, yet still hung from its fingertips, on a laundry-line between two walls,

Its ink, its blood and soul, its weight, its wordiness, its entirety, its all, its whole, its flesh and bones and tongue,

Suspended, stripped, and dripping.

Now, تَخَيَّلُوا – (*takhayyalu*),

Him.

His name is Ashraf.

Poet.

تخيّلوا – (*takhayyalu*),

[him]

– imprisoned for a word, for a poem, for a non-conventional breath, a side-step, a distinct footpath, for a voice, for having a voice, for freedom of speech, for [freedom]

تخيّلوا – (*takhayyalu*),

a poem.

This one.

For him this poem will bear no title,

For him, this poem would have been completely silent – in prayer on its knees, only for him.

[shhh]

But through his enforced silence, mine is loud

– as ours should be.

Mine is loud, oxymoronic loud, whole in its contradictions –

Because for him,

I shall become a revolution.

لا تطفو عادة إلا الأجساد الميتة"

(*La tatfo 'adatan 'illa al ajsad al mayyita*) he said,

"It is mostly only dead bodies that float," he said.

This is an affirmative poem, a rebel poem, a fighter poem, an alive poem –

For we are no corpses, —

our poems are no cemeteries;

they are not meta-eulogies.

This poem is for Ashraf and all the Ashrafs imprisoned,

To all those whose skies have been confiscated,

whose spaces have been appropriated,

Whose nights, their dearest, have been repainted with a darker shade,

Whose everything has been taken away,

save time.

تخيّلوا – (*takhayyalu*), saved time.

تخيّلوا – (*takhayyalu*) that they have taken his spaces and given him time he never wanted.

They took his spaces and gave him time he never wanted – time he never asked for.

تخيّلوا – (*takhayyalu*), that they have drawn us in,

they have sketched us in,

but they have attempted to capture our voices in nets.

So, تخيّلوا – (*takhayyalu*),

Us –

Colouring outside each and every single one of them,
And that his poem is the first scratch out.

Farah Aridi