

When the Silence Sings

A Solo Musical

---

By Rene Zabel

ACT I

SCENE 1

Spotlight on the stage where, stage  
right , the actress stands. Minimal  
set, an arm chair and a piano. A  
scrim is down upstage where  
pictures of could be projected.

It all started long ago in someone else's story  
When you grew up you believed it...  
You believed you could do and be anything  
Whatever your mind could imagine  
Where ever passion was found  
In...in...baseball, cooking, writing, macrame, painting.  
That thing that excited your soul, your drive.  
The air that filled your lungs  
And the joy in your step as you play  
hopscotch on the sidewalk.  
Everyone finds it at some point in their life  
You found it, in a song on the radio,  
And your Aunt playing the piano.  
You ran to your parents begged to learn.  
You wanted to play the piano like Diana,  
you declared to you parents.  
They made some calls,  
You had to wait,  
You weren't school age.  
Patience is a virtue;  
This, your first test of patience,  
Your virtue is in tact.  
You waited for your sixth birthday.

What happened to THAT girl  
SHE knew exactly what she wanted.  
That girl, so small,  
Yet with a voice, loud and large  
Much larger than you were in stature.  
It's as if your soul,  
The essence of you couldn't be contained

In such a minute container.  
The girl who loved to sing and play piano

She crosses to the piano and plays  
a simple tune. Music continues  
under the dialogue, getting more  
advanced.

#### MUSIC LESSON

You practiced on an old upright piano.  
It was so decrepit, the ivory was missing on most of the  
keys.  
Some didn't play at all.  
This didn't detour you from playing.  
When most children has to be coerced to practice,  
It was the opposite for you.  
Music was your escape from the family trait.  
The trait of abuse.  
Your Grandmother abused your Father,  
who abused you and your siblings.  
You played and sang until his words were lost in the lyrics.  
Country music played non-stop at home.  
You heard Tanya Tucker on the radio.  
Tanya Tucker made it at the age of thirteen.  
Why not you?  
Your opportunity... a talent competition  
The grand prize... contract with RCA.  
That twelve year old girl  
Stood, alone,  
Your voice rang out...It echoed...  
The last note of Delta Dawn had them on their feet.  
Over two thousand people stood...  
Applauded...you.  
It was the single most thrilling thing,  
for a twelve year old.  
Yet, the grand prize slipped from your grasp  
into the bowed hands of a fiddle player  
Such a difficult hit to the ego;  
graciousness wasn't part of your vocabulary.

Church is a large portion of life  
in the Bible belt.  
Every Sunday and Wednesday you were taken...  
Then dragged as you grew older  
Your split from the church began  
at fifteen, when you and the other cheerleaders  
Oh My God--dance your asses off



OR KEEP YOU FROM WARM

HIS LOVE BUILDS A BRIDGE  
 HIS LOVE BINDS TWO HEARTS  
 IN LOVE  
 LET THERE BE  
 LOV  
 E

OUR PRAYER FOR THIS WORLD  
 LOVE IS THE CURE  
 IN LOVE  
 LET THERE BE LOVE

NO ONE CAN SAVE YOU  
 OR BRAVE THE STORM  
 NO ONE CAN CARRY  
 OR KEEP YOU FROM HARM

ALONE AND AFRAID  
 GRACE FINDS YOU SAFE  
 IN LOVE  
 LET THERE BE LOVE

YOU'RE EMPTY AND BROKEN  
 YET ARMS ARE WIDE OPEN  
 IN LOVE  
 LET THERE BE LOVE

Throughout high school, each year the church had talent competitions in every region for scholarships to Southern Nazarene University. The competition season always started with an argument with your mother. One you always lost.

(sarcastically)

She had such confidence in your vocal abilities and musicianship-- So much so...she would go through every competitor in each category; determined which category you were to compete in. If a category was empty - she would sign you up. "This way you will win." Every year - four years running- the same, Your mother's belief in your mediocrity punctuated your own Salieri complex.

You could believe in love.  
 As a teenager, the terms misogyny and patriarchy  
 weren't part of your vocabulary.  
 You felt trapped in that fundamentalist cesspool  
 You tried running, but living five miles from any town  
 and a mile from your nearest neighbor,  
 who were also your grandparents,  
 Not the most caring of people.  
 Your brother's first sentence, when asked about Grandma -  
 "I hate that woman"  
 When your mother gave you loving advice to find a man,  
 since you would never be able to take care of yourself,  
 The only way you could survive was to be married.  
 You weren't as smart as your brother or your sister.  
 That was the antithesis of your relationship with your  
 mother. The scars she inflicted were emotional.

Parkinson's shook your family. Your father diagnosed at 35.  
 A move to another small town, where your mother could teach,  
 Brought the added bonus, the Evangelical church left behind  
 but church services were still a part of your life.  
 You traveled with the teen choir, sang during service.  
 You had the reputation as a strong belter  
 and are handed the lead with every production,  
 even if you don't want it.

That girl had a sense of where her soul belonged  
 and where it didn't.  
 You don't belong here!  
 Your subconscious played the same line over and over;  
 looping inside your brain, as the rest of the cast filed into  
 the choir loft.  
 Your extra-curricular activities  
 Disqualified you from Christian Teen of the year.  
 If they really knew me...  
 If the Teen minister,  
 the preacher or your cast mates saw who you truly were  
 They would have said  
 "You are a fraud." "We know who you really are."  
 It was the same mantra that  
 projected itself in your mind,  
 like a flashing LED sign.

The Nazarene church had the typical giant cross  
 which hung on the back of the choir loft wall  
 The scraping sound, behind you

interrupted your internal condemnation.  
 You were stunned, shocked, even,  
 when that cross fell with a thud,  
 like a hammer made contact with a watermelon  
 The pain shot through the top of your head  
 to your jaw.  
 What the Hell!  
 An exclamation unacceptable  
 in polite church society,  
 Enough to make the blue hairs  
 clutch their pearls and gasp their indignation.  
 It only made your mother sigh and roll her eyes,  
 which was her way of letting all know she was annoyed.  
 Heed the sign!

Music led every decision, every moment  
 Junior year could have been your last,  
 However, your parents decided for you.  
 So, music filled your senior year schedule  
 Graduation topped this milestone with a scholarship  
 and a solo, If You Really Knew me.  
 Song selections were made based on your self worth.  
 This particular song seemed apropos  
 for your 18 years of life.

Every single choice made in this life, altered everything.  
 Your decision to attend Southern Nazarene University  
 with a vocal scholarship.  
 The only one you were really proud of.  
 The one you auditioned for against your mother's directive.  
 The sign - universal 4x4 on top of your head...literally!  
 The sign - You're on the wrong path.  
 You ignore all the signs...  
 Go ahead make things harder for yourself.  
 Fake your way through.  
 This led to, yet another, stumbling block.  
 You have been used to being the lead, the star,  
 not the case at SNU  
 When you can't fake the testimony.  
 They wouldn't accept the passion of the song,  
 only the tearful spoken word  
 with uplifted arms to the heavens  
 These words couldn't fall haphazardly from you lips,

You were pushed from solid ground that once  
 was your identity, the once gleaming star  
 faded at eighteen...a has been.  
 Your voice...silenced. You were demoralized .  
 Reverted to your go to ...walls up...fell back on  
 acceptance within a relationship  
 love through sex  
 Which lead to...

The tall brunette walked into chapel;  
 sat beside you, had the bluest eyes - heaven help your heart  
 You've ever seen , blue...no violet eyes stared back at you.  
 Married him at eighteen, two kids...divorced by twenty-one.  
 You looked back on those years  
 and wonder if you had just looked away from those eyes.  
 But, you returned the look,  
 used every ounce of your flirtations to capture him.

They all should come with warning labels, like cigarettes or  
 alcohol.

WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!

WHY DON'T THEY COME

WITH A WARNING WARNING WARNING

May blame you for his imagined inadequacies.  
 After all, if you had just paid more attention.

MAY BE A HAZARD TO YOU LIFE

MAY BE HE DOESN'T WANT A WIFE

TURN YOUR MIND INTO A MESS

TEAR YOUR HEART OUT THROUGH YOUR CHEST

WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!

If you hadn't have been pregnant with kid number two,  
 his hands wouldn't have explored some freshman,  
 while you sought solace in an epidural.

You should have seen the signs.  
Mr. Violet eyes, once a computer genius  
who, previously, could get assignments completed in hours.  
Suddenly, had to spend nights in the computer lab...  
never could quite get his assignments completed on time.  
WARNING! Objects in the window are closer than they appear.

That picture window framed your husband  
Ensnared in a scene from some torrid soap opera.  
You carried your newborn with a two year old in tow.  
As you watched HER.  
You felt her slither her way into your life  
SHE slid in so easily, you stared, in horror,  
Unable to stop the fatal blow as your heart sputtered  
Your heart stopped.  
The shatter could be heard for miles  
Echoed through the barren fields  
Splintered off the canyon walls  
atomic shards of ice cold,  
blood red,  
bitter knife in the back.  
SHE filleted it, served it up with fava beans and Chianti.  
Mr. Violet eyes, didn't have a decent bone in his body  
To murder you to your face.  
Nothing prepared you for any of this.  
He regarded it all as insignificant...  
It was only your heart, your stone cold heart.

Yet, after all that, you still wanted reconciliation.  
You offered forgiveness.  
Mr. Violet eye's father gave "stellar" advice--  
"You won't forgive him, you will never forget.  
You will always have the power, now."  
There is a moral of that sad story,  
To the in-laws: Leave it alone. It's not your life.

Your luck, or lack thereof ran out.  
It ended the day he left.  
Luck left tread marks as it fled from your grasp.

Single mothers were left defenseless  
At the mercy of the system.  
One must work to live. Children must have care.

Slapped your hands, cut your pay.  
 Head to rock, life to hard place.  
 The shatter echoed far beyond the empty battlefield.  
 Help doesn't know the way to you. Guess GPS couldn't find you.  
 You want sympathy?  
 Its in the dictionary, between sex and syphilis.  
 Then, "help" came disguised...  
 But, came disguised as a stranger, staring at your misfortune  
 With the blue eyes that you once adored.  
 His face is a tight smirk at your hands clasped,  
 begged for his help  
 your children's father....  
 Just please.... Please!  
 You're on your knees  
 Conditions are requested that tear your heart  
 Into mounds of bleeding flesh.  
 The price of assistance - rescind parental custody.  
 What choice did you have?  
 What power did you possess?  
 You handed them over, along with the knife  
 Which he plunged deep.

WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!

MAY KICK YOU WHILE YOUR DOWN.

AND TREAT YOU LIKE SOME CLOWN

BETTER HEED THAT WARNING!

That one was the first in your collection...  
 Of Heads in jars...  
 In the basement.

You gave up the best part of you  
 Those blue eyes become deadly  
 How could you fight?  
 Run to you parents....  
 Laughable!  
 In that situation... trapped  
 Begged for mercy.... you couldn't escape.  
 No matter what choice you made....  
 You found that your patience is tested.  
 You failed that test.  
 Again patience is a virtue.  
 And YOU are NOT virtuous!

You lose!  
Where the hell was that warning?

How do you celebrate your twenty-first birthday?  
You celebrate with strippers, of course.  
A lap dance from a Chippendale dancer  
Followed by a bar hop  
Dressed in your best 80's shoulder pads  
And double breasted shirts ala Michael Jackson.  
Where you met, Mike or Mahmoud...  
Whatever his name was...  
Your next ex...the Arab ex.

WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!

MAY HAVE A TOUCH OF NPD

YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN WHAT YOU SEE

MAY BE A HAZARD TO YOU LIFE

MAY BE HE HAS ANOTHER WIFE

TURN YOUR MIND INTO A MESS

TEAR YOUR HEART OUT THROUGH YOUR CHEST

WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!

May contain narcissistic personality disorder.  
Please seek professional help  
Possible manipulation  
gaslighting, compulsive lying.

If only the warning had been real.  
You figured you'd just listen to some music;  
have a couple of drinks, then leave.  
You, then hear in your ear:  
"Take off your glasses"  
Four words that altered your world,  
fall from the mysterious man standing over you.  
That man called himself Mike; originally from Italy.  
Didn't drink anything but Coke,  
Why?  
When you asked..."didn't like to drink."

Though odd, you shrugged it off.  
 What a good looking specimen...sexy...smoldering  
 Oh, what the hell.

He takes you back to his apartment...  
 Doubt nudged you...ever so gently  
 That good angel on your shoulder, taps you...Ummm  
 "Do you think this is wise?"  
 But, you don't listen to your angel's voice.  
 All good girl voices were shut down.  
 Miss good angel knocked down and out by your devil voice.  
 It wasn't a one night stand...  
 Your virtue, though dusty, wasn't  
 soiled

.

While he was in the shower,  
 suspicion prevailed.  
 What did this guy need to hide?  
 The drawers, cabinets....  
 Flew open.  
 Aha! Right there is plain sight...  
 A passport.  
 Ha! Mr. Mystery man.  
 How does he lie? Let us count the ways.  
 Lie number one,  
 His name was not Mike,  
 It took you numerous times to pronounce his name. Mawkmood,  
 Mahhhhmud, Machmoo, Makkkmood, then finally, Mahmoud.  
 He was NOT Italian,  
 but had a Jordanian passport and was Kurdish/Syrian.  
 The excuse given, by Mahmoud, people don't accept Arabs.  
 Mike, an easier name to pronounce, was accepted.  
 Ok, you gave him that one.  
 The smoldering Arab knew how to put forth the charm  
 Would you allow him to stay until his flight to LA  
 For his sister, since they weren't allowed to travel alone.  
 Your daughters were used as an excuse to refuse.

You were flailing in life -  
 like an undertow pulled you out to sea.  
 Your dreams turned to nightmares  
 The picket fence became a barricade  
 You were an outsider in your own life.  
 The Arab ex's trip to LA for a week  
 turned to a month, turned to five months.

Well, it was good while it lasted.

Next!

Any takers?

You took this advantage of time

to acquaint yourself with the city night life.

Your favorite club...

After Daddy's Money...sounded more like a strip club...

First, as a customer, dancing took you far away  
from the grayness of your day to day.

Then you tried your hand as a waitress...

a VERY short lived venture.

This led to dangerous choices in nameless men

which you used to fill the black hole in your universe.

Your habit of multiple Kamikaze's, melted your brain -  
oblivion.. a welcomed respite from feeling.

Emotions were worthless - emptiness circled you heart.

Like a gator infested mote

You didn't have the courage to off yourself

So you opted to allow your life to slowly be eviscerated,  
your guilt would be appeased.

The universe laughed, yet again,

like this was some sadistic game and not your life

sent you a lifeline

The exotic, hot, foreigner

Reached through the phone line, begged for forgiveness.

You had to admit his groveling gave you a sorted thrill

After all, that smoldering Arab

didn't contact you once during those five months.

Your crippled life, that held promise

allowed you to call this man.

You wanted to believe that this call was a sign...

that it was a light at the end a dark molding tunnel.

You never imagine that it was a fucking locomotive.

But, then again, maybe you did.

Just maybe, you wanted that train

to obliterate whatever was left of your miserable life.

WARNING! Head on collision eminent.

The steaming hot foreign charm, slid over your wounds

Hard to Say I'm Sorry - the ammunition used to win you over  
with very little effort.

Fear of homelessness closed the deal.

The image of yourself in rags pushing a shopping cart

wasn't the look you were going for, at the age of twenty-one.  
 WARNING! May lead to loss of freedom.  
 But, this guy was completely different  
 He was exotic. His family had money.  
 LOADS of money.  
 Did you sell your freedom?

(shrugs)

You acquiesce to the demand  
 to keep locked in a room when Arab friends were over.  
 You found yourself a voyeur at the bedroom door;  
 foreign voices filled the air beyond.  
 Curiosity built -- you tried to listen,  
 But, you followed the strict instruction  
 and stood behind the door, like a well trained puppy.  
 Why?

In your feeble mind, you believed  
 That the outcome of speaking out...  
 If you let this man hear your objections  
 This would mean a life on the streets.  
 You walked into the cage  
 Locked it behind you  
 And handed him the key.

She crosses to the piano. Plays  
 under dialogue.

NOTHING BETTER TO DO

There wasn't a proposal, on one knee -  
 no romantic gesture, no flowery declarations.  
 No words of love,  
 Just an agreement, if you will.  
 A Green card and citizenship part and parcel.  
 On that anti climactic day,  
 your girlfriend Ana,  
 who took you to that bar called

SHE SAID, HEY WHATCHA DOIN?  
 HAVE ANY PLANS TODAY?  
 I NEED A DRESS, LETS GO SHOPPING  
 GET A SMOOTHIE ON THE WAY

You said

I WISH I COULD, NO I'M SORRY  
 I'M GETTING MARRIED

She then moaned...

OH JEEZE DONT MARRY THAT GUY  
HE'S A LOSER,  
YOU KNOW HE JUST LIES

When you said

I'VE NOTHING BETTER TO DO  
NOTHING BETTER TO DO  
IT DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE

What more could be lost, by marrying this man?

How much more pain could be inflicted?

Love held no promise.

You married for love...once.

You figured it didn't mean anything...

Your heart was blackened.

Hurt couldn't penetrate.

You were virtually Dead On Arrival.

The universe, that perverse bitch...

said... hold my

beer

.

Mr. Arab made use of his love for cars,  
followed in his friend's Mr. GQ and Mr. Mechanic's  
footsteps,

Bought cars to sell...

The first, a BMW 500....a beautiful machine...

until he hydroplaned...did a 180 degree turn,

stopped in the lane headed in the opposite direction.

in front of a van, which couldn't stop in time.

The impact caused the car to spin out of control.

To this day you can still see the images spiral.

In those days, seat belts weren't mandatory.

A kind policemen stated that it was a good thing  
you were without one

While the seat belt would have held you in place.

two bars, which held the bumper onto the car

rammed through the back seat

into the front seat and had pushed you into the  
dashboar

d

Your habit of chewing your lip, when nervous  
caused you to bite through it when you hit the dashboard.

Knocked unconscious,

the roof of the ambulance was your first view when you woke.  
 The sexy Arab's sense of humor  
 came out in the most morbid fashion.  
 "Hey, how about some Jig Jig, (sex)?"  
 Sure hop on over! Then you passed out again  
 Huge, bright lights, overhead shook you awake.  
 A female voice asked your name--  
 Your memory was spotting at best.  
 Was it Zabel? Barnett? Alkordi?  
 Are you married? You couldn't remember

Cold, wet, cloth swiped your face and your eyes..  
 "Not the eyes...contacts"  
 Stitches in your lip and a neck brace,  
 plus somehow the muscle in your right arm -  
 mangled and torn.  
 Given as parting gifts from the hospital after a 2 day stay.  
 Plus six months of physical therapy.  
 Once out of the hospital and able to sit upright,  
 you visited the totaled car at the junk yard.  
 This once beautiful machine  
 had been left with only a front seat and a hood.  
 The back seat sat even with the back of the front seats,  
 With the gas tank unprotected,  
 stuck out from what used to be the bumper  
 Insurance adjusters questioned the events.  
 The Arab coached you as to what to say.  
 Why he told you, was never known, but  
 that wasn't an accident, it was all for insurance money  
 Which he, years later, tried again and was indicted for  
 insurance  
 fraud

.

WARNING! Now that the universe took it as a challenge.

Six months in....  
 The Arab left for London...  
 Once again, Mrs. Child Bride and her daughter  
 had to have a guardian  
 For these women, travel gave them something...  
 something they never had at home...  
 Freedom.

Home was not a place of solace.  
 Home, though twenty four carat, diamond encrusted  
 Fur lined, silk cushioned  
 With rose colored glasses...  
 was Still a cage.  
 Go home, lock the door, hand her husband the key.  
 Go home, lock the door, hand her brother the key.  
 Hand her son the key...  
 On holiday, the bearded men held the key.  
 Bejeweled cages unlocked...  
 The birds flew, with a golden tether...  
 The credit card... in the bearded man's name.  
 Freedom had a price.  
 Then it was your time to escape.  
 (beat)

Two weeks in England, then Mr. Gold Card,  
 once again, dangled the tether;  
 sent all to Madrid.  
 In London... a rented flat.  
 In Madrid...a five star hotel.  
 Madrid, allowed you to really see a Muslim woman  
 in her natural habitat.  
 Like a caged bird set free from bondage  
 her hair blew in the breeze. Her smile lit up the room;  
 filled rooms with laughter.  
 Fetters, golden, though they were, fell away.

The hotel had a nightly show - topless.  
 Lots of breasts.  
 The obsession with breasts became quite evident  
 Mr. Arab even offered you the grand gesture of a boob job...  
 the bigger the better.  
 You look down at the less than  
 impressive view of your own feet.  
 Cleavage wasn't a word you had ever  
 used in reference to your chest.  
 Eyes are glued to... the stage.  
 Folded arms did nothing to hide your unfortunate ones.  
 Where his eyes became focused as if to compare -  
 where yours came up wanting.  
 It was at this moment...for a single moment,  
 you entertained the offer.

WARNING! FETISH!

You listened... this time.

There are two things you remember  
whenever Madrid comes to mind  
The palaces, the Chrystal palace...your favorite  
and the day you drank from a public water fountain.  
...NEVER drink the water from a faucet or fountain.

It wasn't that you didn't know,  
even though you never traveled outside the US.  
Wasn't it common knowledge?  
Yet, you believe your husband when he answered  
Your request for a drink with,  
..."just drink from the fountain."  
You counter,  
"you shouldn't drink water in a foreign country."  
His belittlement of your "paranoia"  
silenced your objections and you drank.  
You drank from the bacterial infested chemistry beaker

On the next flight --  
every hour from Madrid to Damascus  
proved to be a gastric cacophony...  
echoing through the fuselage.  
You were afraid everyone could hear the rumblings,  
like some giant beast inside your belly.  
Hands covered your pressed lips...  
in hopes to muffle the moans.  
Your mind screamed, Not now!  
Thank God, you weren't far from the lavatory.  
Horrorified by the embarrassing sounds from said hazmat dump,  
You returned to your seat next to your "loving" husband,  
Who found it all soooooo entertaining.  
You would have given him a go to hell look,  
but you don't have the energy.  
Bearing the discomfort in silence you smile and  
prayed for the plane to crash into the Alps,  
which you viewed, so picturesquely out the window.  
The plane landed, your senses were assaulted...  
the sounds ...the smells.  
Snippets of language rolled over you

This new experience...  
 swirled in flowered phrases and sounds,  
 phonetically, bombarded your ears -  
 tones and strange sounding syllables wafted through  
 tickled your brain without comprehension.  
 Understanding it was beyond your capabilities.  
 The words spiraled around you  
 Nonsensical phrases and terms  
 ricocheted off your ears with  
 spinning clusters of conversation.

Crosses to piano; plays under  
 dialogue.

SYRIA'S THEME

The land had a song of its own.  
 Rolling through the sand colored soil.  
 It blew between the fronds of the palm trees  
 Lifted to the heavens.

Fields of tan soil flew by  
 as the taxi sped down the highway.  
 The magnitude of the scene had you speechless.  
 The road to Damascus held traces of Paul's conversion.  
 You didn't subscribe to the beliefs,  
 of the prophets  
 Yet, there was a marked entrance into the mystical  
 the magical presence of ancient history,  
 Older than Jesus, Paul and the twelve;  
 the magic and legend under the footprints of the prophets.  
 Minaret's rose above the masjids to the sky -  
 a closer view of heaven.

Damascus, the once sparkling city of  
 villas, flats, and ancient garden homes.  
 Her majesty still lived in your mind's eye.  
 Your appreciation grew...  
 until the call of prayer at five bloody a.m.  
 Alahuakbar vibrated the flat walls.  
 Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! What was that?  
 Snores rose from beside you,  
 a harsh competition with the wails.  
 Were you being bombed? Raided?  
 The muezzin's, the man calling the prayer, wailing ended.

Beside you, Mr. Arab lay peacefully asleep.  
 How could he have slept through that noise?  
 Was he deaf, and you hadn't figured that out, yet.  
 "I'm yoo-zed (the way he pronounced the word "used") to it"  
 Your annoyance ...He found amusing  
 By the end of the sleep deprived two weeks...  
 secret plans were made....  
 To end the source of the wailing....  
 Preferably, with a gag in place.

Lest it be forgotten.... the ill advised bacteria beaker  
 Wasn't to be undone. Helpful hands offered little white pills  
 Your protest was countered with "la la la.... Jidden moneeh"  
 No, it's very good.  
 Your Blood pressure bottomed out...  
 your eyes couldn't stay opened....  
 A mad rush to the hospital.  
 Archaic, third world,  
 medical instruments are whisked in on metal trolleys.  
 A stainless steel syringe with a needle....  
 as huge as a meat thermometer came at you.  
 That's gonna leave a giant hole!  
 Hot fire is pushed from the metal tube into your arm....  
 Accompanied by your screams.  
 The doctor at the other end,  
 had the bed side manner of the Anti Christ.  
 Even though, you had to admit he was right..you survived.

Winding roads, lined with jasmine, perfumed your way  
 up the mountain from Rukn Al-Din  
 The street narrowed..  
 Sunlight ricocheted off the alabaster courtyard homes  
 gleamed on both sides of the path.  
 Jasmine combined with Syrian wild flowers  
 filled the air with intoxicating sweetness...  
 masked the smell of ancient  
 soil

.

In Islam, kindness is a mark of faith...  
 With outstretched arms,  
 the Arab ex's uncle embodied this tenant,

His smile was as bright as the sun on the alabaster walls.  
 " Asalam alaikum. Ahlen...Ahlen...  
 Perfume, jewelry were gifted for your marriage.  
 The lamb served.... Eyed you from the platter.  
 Your eyes averted its dead stare...  
 The uncle reached over and turned the poor lambs eyes away.

From the city of jasmine to the bride of the red sea.

(beat)

Damascus... ancient, antiquated, weathered and  
 beaten...dusty.  
 Jeddah.... Bright, modern, maiden of the dessert sun  
 That city shown with gold, jewels, cars....  
 Money was everything and everywhere,  
 street upon street of cleaned and polished golden cages...  
 Change occurred mid flight.  
 Laughing, smiling, modern women...  
 Transformed.  
 Where bright swaths of colored cashmere  
 linen and silk entered in Damascus  
 Black silk abiyas exited in Jeddah,  
 some with covered faces,  
 Dark and mysterious eyes gleam from the faceless black.  
 with hushed voices down turned eyes trailed  
 Gray haired men with flowing white robes.  
 You followed your silk clad sister-in-law  
 to a waiting silver Mercedes.  
 Shocked at their transformation,  
 their entire demeanor changed,  
 Joy disappeared as the black sedan  
 pulled into the gates to the three story villa.  
 Your internal question buzzed around your head;  
 How could there be such sadness if you lived like this?  
 The question was answered when Mr. Gold Card.  
 His late sixties gray hair...his lined, emotionless face;  
 Married at forty to her young and innocent fourteen.  
 He already had a wife and two older sons.  
 Who, when he died, took guardianship over their father's widow.  
 They wanted her villa, she refused.  
 They turned off her electricity.  
 She wasn't going to let their petty decades long grievances  
 against her win out and render her  
 homeless

.

Saudi culture equaled misogyny squared.

Women did not drive and were not seen in the front seat,  
 She sat in the back.  
 One evening, while out driving,  
 you sat in front with the Arab ex, stopped at a red light.  
 A Mercedes full of white robed young Saudi men  
 started to slowly pass in front.  
 Traffic had stopped, where the Mercedes  
 halted in line with yours.  
 One man-boy in a white keffiyah (Saudi head covering)  
 stared blatantly from the back seat,  
 As if you were an oddity in some freak museum.  
 You, very brazenly, stared back.  
 The man/boy was so focused on you,  
 he slowly placed the lit end of a cigarette, in his mouth  
 Ash fell on his chest as his hands slapped off the ash.  
 Arabic curses formed on his lips  
 His blustering and cursing caused eruptions of laughter  
 The poor man was NOT amused  
 that you openly laughed and mocked him.  
 Mr. Arab, of course, used this incident as a learning...  
 actually, correcting opportunity.  
 He admonished you, like a petulant school girl.  
 How dare you! You insulted a man by laughing at him.  
 You sat, without a word, and nodded.  
 Silenced.

Soon, the Saudi routine settled in.  
 Men disappeared during the day...  
 With such vast wealth bearded men and black clad women  
 sought out entertainment, which may not be considered  
 Halal with the realms of Sharia law.  
 During the days you worked out and listened to your walkman.  
 Remember those? You carried that thing everywhere.  
 You found that the life in Saudi Arabia was one of boredom.  
 Mr. Gold Card, presented your sister-in-law, with a new villa  
 Actually, more like a monstrosity.  
 She was so proud of her new villa,  
 but you found it hard to find positive words  
 An office building, it was an office building.  
 A four storied, stark white building  
 With wall to wall marble and an elevator to boot.  
 On the same street, many palatial skeletal estates  
 stood half completed...abandoned.  
 One such buildings, built by a jeweler, for his daughter.  
 in the shape of a solitaire diamond in a ring setting.  
 If the Saudi Princess couldn't have them

no one would.  
That was also the fate of your sister-in-law's office  
building

.

Bearded men waltzed in at two p.m. for food and sleep...  
back out at five.  
Mr. Gold Card - the purse bearer,  
carried stacks of cash  
to the government...  
Wealth...Controlled... moderated... paid off.

Insults became a form of manipulation and torture.  
Where was that warning?  
You were fat...you're a cow. Why did you eat that?  
Your self esteem crouched - demoralized.  
You stood there in your sweats  
perspiration still glistened on your brow -  
You must be a cow. The sum of your weight equaled 115.  
115 hurls around your skull,  
then tossed it aside...irrelevant.  
The ONLY words you keep are - You're a cow.  
And You're going home...  
Alone...  
Rhymes and verse filled the final days by the Red Sea -  
a wealth of poetry  
tumbled to the page.  
The cage you had locked behind you.... Closed in...  
Without a way to let those thoughts  
and feelings out through song.  
Words became your outlet, your notes and rhythm  
Rhyme became your harmony

She crosses to the piano and begins  
playing. She does not sing. The  
poem is spoken.

TRACES OF TIME  
(spoken)

YOU HAVE LOCKED ME IN A CAGE

YOU HAVE CHAINED ME TO THE WALL

MY WILL TO BREAK FREE KEEPS ME STRONG

YOU SAY MY LIFE IS YOURS,

MY LAND IS NOT MY OWN  
YOUR HAND HOLDS THE KEY TO MY SOUL  
CAN YOU SEE MY HANDS ARE TIED  
CAN YOU FEEL MY PAIN AND GRIEF  
ARE YOU SURE MY LIFE IS OVER  
AS YOU LOOK UPON MY FACE  
LOOK INTO MY EYES SEE ME AS I AM  
I AM SO VERY MUCH LIKE YOU  
AS YOU WALK ALONG THE ROAD  
AS YOU TRAVEL ON YOUR WAY  
LOOK INTO THEIR FACES  
CAN YOU HEAR THE WORDS THEY SAY  
LISTEN TO THE HEARTACHE  
SEE THE MILES OF TEARS  
SHADOWS OF THE LIFE THEY LEFT BEHIND  
SEE WITH YOUR HEART  
HEAR WITH YOUR SOUL  
THE TRACES OF TIME MARK MY JOURNEY HOME  
THE LINES ON MY FACE SHOW THE MAPS OF TEARS  
THAT LEAD ME TO MY HOME

What had you done? Were you too moody?  
Were you really fat? Did you turn him off?  
When your flight from Jeddah had a lay over in Frankfurt.  
You landed in Frankfurt, you were determined to change.  
You would make the transformation to whatever he wanted.  
This had to work.  
No, this was not a conventional marriage...  
No romance... no love spoken.

But, divorce was not an option.  
 Because your mother's words echoed with every thought.  
 Now, you put aside the Arab for a moment,  
 As the next leg of the flight...from Frankfurt to Dallas.  
 The problem of Mr. Arab had to wait...  
 The hum of the engines lulled everyone to sleep.  
 When the plane landed in Dallas customs was a nightmare.  
 Your luggage did not arrive in Texas  
 So the only clothes you had were those on your back.  
 Then, insult added to injury,  
 You missed your flight to Oklahoma City  
 A kindly couple offered up their seats in order for you to  
 continue your journey home - after all it was Thanksgiving

As the lights of Oklahoma City drew nearer,  
 Then the plane landed, your first thought--  
 your daughters. You had called them  
 and sent them letters throughout your trip.  
 Many gifts, for them, filled an extra suitcase.  
 You needed to see them, first thing.  
 Their house, stark, empty and dark, as you drove up  
 Ex number one's truck stood in the driveway...  
 Mr. Violet eyes came out carrying boxes.  
 They were moving...  
 He had married the usurper while you were away.  
 Her assumption of your life--complete.  
 But, things weren't all roses in his world  
 He lamented on his regrets...  
 Later, your daughter told you  
 He had kept your wedding ring,  
 which you had thrown in his face.  
 He wondered at an affair with you, now.  
 You, politely...why the fuck politely?  
 Yet, politely, negated his request.  
 Then papers were delivered...  
 His wife wanted...to adopt?  
 WTF?!?!?  
 One more blow...you returned to the U.S. alone  
 Your future with the Arab unknown...  
 Now this...?  
 If the old adage, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger  
 were true, then you were fucking Wonder Woman.  
 His lies, "we didn't know where you were."  
 "We didn't know when or if you'd be back."  
 The facts were ignored -

the calls, letters, gifts, all omitted.  
Mr. Violet eyes decided to throw you a bone  
Said he would cancel the court papers if you  
let him claim both girls for tax exemptions.  
You agreed, it was better than losing all rights.  
Unbeknownst to you as well...your parents sued for  
visitation...Your time cut in half. Thanks Mom!

FADE

ACT II

FADE IN

At your parent's house... a plan formed.  
 Years of the Christian Church touting the saying  
 if a couple prays together, stays together,  
 Finally came in handy.  
 your basis for this new spiritual journey began.  
 What was Mahmoud's religion? Islam  
 At first glance a different belief system  
 According to the Quran and the Imam you contacted  
 Women were honored in Islam.  
 At the foot of heaven lies the mother.  
 These two edicts from Prophet Muhammad were the basis  
 to lure you in.  
 At the time, you didn't see how women of Islam and  
 Christianity were really the same -  
 Under the same patriarchal construct.  
 It didn't occur to you to even look. Very naive of you.  
 A different world...a disparate belief.  
 The basis of his faith...the Quran..  
 Five pillars with hands to the heavens  
 The prophets, Jesus, Muhammed, all the messengers.  
 In your mind you believed that if you understood his faith  
 In turn you would understand him.

Weeks flew by, your excitement to share with him  
 A sense of purpose, of meaning...  
 Mr. Arab would be proud of you.  
 You craved it...his approval.  
 Right?  
 He finally arrived home with his brother,  
 Mr. Two Wives, in tow.

WARNING! May lead to night terrors and sleep walking.

The panic attacks at night... you woke -  
 found yourself in front of the closet....  
 hand turned the light on and off...  
 Off and on.... On-off

WARNING! May cause one to be intellectually celibate.

Lies are piled upon lies.  
 Truth became a rare commodity. Compounded by the brother.  
 Reality was questioned....  
 No, you don't understand what was done or said.  
 Are you stupid? You look in the mirror  
 Stupid is not on your forehead.

Slowly, methodically, change took hold.  
 Your clothing, your speech, your food.  
 Bismillah... when you sneezed....someone else sneezed  
 Mashallah... when told you're pretty...  
 or a baby was cute.  
 You allowed yourself to be immersed into Islam.  
 Change didn't occur over night.  
 Weddings were planned for your brother and sister,  
 where you were asked to sing.  
 Mr. Arab mocked as you practiced the music.  
 "What is that noise? It sounds like a cat dying.  
 You can't sing, it's ugly. Don't do that while I'm here.  
 Muslim woman weren't supposed to sing."  
 Attacks on you talent were shot like cannon fodder,  
 until you no longer sang in his presence.

You still persisted in your journey  
 Gave up alcohol.... Okay.. Not so bad...  
 Gave up pork... okay...  
 Gave up bacon... (beat)  
 --bacon was different...  
 It wasn't pork...was it? Seriously!  
 -----fine gave up bacon!

Five pillars of Faith,  
 Of prayer,  
 Of fasting,  
 Of giving, and of pilgrimage.  
 You held fast to these acts. They became your sanctuary...  
 For a time.  
 Your patience is virtuous... for now.  
 Your world was a foundation of egg shells.  
 Every word, thought...deed measured -  
 Found wanting.

Then Mr. Two Wives made reservations for his return to Saudi,

Mr. Arab planned to go as well  
As a good wife should, his laundry was washed.  
When you moved the clothes from the washer to the drier  
in amongst his jeans...his passport  
made a sloppy wet thud against the metal drum of the dryer.  
A deed, which you thought would be good  
Exploded into three days of angry silence.  
It's not as if you purposely washed it  
Why was it left in his jeans?  
That question didn't help you case either.

Their bags... packed.... Flights boarded.  
His eyes never met yours... he walked away.  
Weeks flew by...  
Phone didn't ring  
A month later...  
A letter arrived.... on a day when gray settled into town.  
Ice and snow covered everything.  
Finally word ...words  
Words that cut deep. You were not worthy to be his wife.  
You would lower the status of any child of that marriage.  
You were an American, a believer, yes, but still an American.  
Was this your reality again?  
None of the words written in that letter made sense.

A Muslim friend called from California.  
She stayed with her family in Riverside  
while she waited to move to Saudi, to be with her husband.  
Her invitation to visit lifted you spirits  
California looked promising. It was green.  
There were trees,  
so refreshing from the stark gray of Oklahoma;  
California felt new and exciting.  
All your horrid history resided in Oklahoma.  
No one knew you.  
No one knew.... Him!  
A new life... a new journey.  
The past could be left behind in the dark, cold, grayness.  
You could fly out of the drab,  
You could be your own Dorothy, awake to brilliant color.  
Plans came together...the universe worked on all thrusters.  
Belongings were sold, apartment lease...notice given.  
Resignation accepted. Car sold...

one way ticket to paradise purchased.

Then...Fade To black... right?

Oh, the universe is a trickster. Made you think....

What do you mean Mr. Arab was...in town...

Looked at the positive. Saw a path to gain closure.

Tell the son of a bitch just what you thought...

that was the conversation in your mind.

Surveillance began bright and early in the morning

..with your car parked in the church parking lot,

across from Mr. Mechanic's auto shop.

You sat, imagined all the things you wanted to say.

Went over and over the list of grievances.

A sports car pulled into the shop. It was Mr. Arab...

You started the car... he looked up... eyes met.

He took off... Coward!

What did you do? Leave? Say, it's for the best?

No, you were livid....you were...(sigh) pissed off.

He ran! Like a little boy... afraid to face you!

No. He was NOT getting away with that.

You pulled into the shop. Really casual like.

You, with your tight jeans, short sweater and red sunglasses.

You could feel the boys' interest...

Until you said... Where is he?

"Oh shit", Mr. Mechanic responded.

Make no mistake, Mr. Arab knew it was you.

He called the shop.

Gave Mr. Mechanic the message for you.

You met him at the coffee shop.

Then the stupid smacked you.

You shouldn't have looked at his smoldering sneer.

You should have stood your ground...

You looked up... and he smiled. You melted....

Canceled ticket... Moved back in.

Time moved on...old patterns re-emerged.

You'd lost another part of your voice... You were silent.

He made comments when you would sing

So, you no longer sang... Again, you were silent.

Your voice muted. Your mouth sewn shut.

Might as well have put rings through your lips.

You found a note on your car...  
 Dear Mike....Oh how rich! Same M.O.  
 Dear Mike,  
 "I wanted to tell you how much you mean to me. I love the  
 time we spend together.  
 I can't wait to be in your arms again.  
 Love, Candi"

Mr. Arab swore by Allah, Wa'Allah Altheem.  
 Mezchnoona Heeyah, Candi was crazy....  
 she made it all up.  
 She believed he wanted her... chased him...  
 He had nothing to do with it... it was her.  
 You were stupid, you believed him.  
 Gaslighting 101  
 Then he constantly reminded you of her.  
 How Candi did whatever he would say.  
 Sinéad O'Connor singing Nothing Compares To You  
 compelled him to tell you that was her song for her love.  
 How could she have a song, when you were  
 denied  
 ?

To put you off the scent  
 two tickets to Cairo, courtesy of Mr. Gold Card.  
 Don't mind if I do.  
 Every city had its own distinct smell.  
 Cairo...  
 Exhaust fumes and manure.  
 Cairo - the city that always honks  
 drivers honked at every fucking thing..  
 Or nothing...they just honked.  
 Never stopped...twenty-four hours a  
 day  
 .

Mrs. Child Bride was in the mood to party in Cairo.  
 Your first night in town... Egyptian belly dancers.  
 You even got up in front of the crowd,  
 The child bride told them you could dance.  
 Let the American dance they said.  
 So you did.  
 A dinner cruise on the Nile  
 filled with Egyptian music,

at one point would have brought joy  
 to hear the oud, violins, oboe, and doumbek.  
 All the different chords and harmonies  
 Nothing you had heard before outside a  
 cassette

.

To the ancient Egyptians  
 the pyramids were built on Primordial ground,  
 where all earth was created -  
 the burial mound of the Pharaohs.  
 Groups of men with horses and camels  
 ..vie for your attention.  
 A young black Arabian stallion caught your eye,  
 With the wind at your back the Arabian  
 horse raced from the pyramid of Khufu  
 To Menakaure...  
 Your laughter echoed across the desert.  
 You hadn't felt that free in years.  
 All your cares evaporated in the wind.  
 Until the universe played another wild card.

An Egyptian friend invited everyone  
 Out for the evening  
 Mrs. Child Bride, with her so called  
 Freedom from Mr. Gold Card,  
 his credit card, her invisible leash  
 saw every opportunity of enjoyment.  
 She was young and still spirited.  
 Excitement filled the flat,  
 as curling irons, makeup,  
 clothes scattered on chairs and beds.

You were trained - like a disobedient child.  
 Eyes darted away -  
 the floor became exceedingly interesting.  
 Patterns of the highly polished wood floor  
 were fascinating.  
 As He grew silent,  
 he sulked in the corner.  
 First, you asked, "Aren't you getting dressed?"  
 No, he doesn't want to go.  
 You asked if you could still go.

Mr. Arab responded, Go ahead.  
You continued to applied the makeup.  
Curled the hair. Donned the clothes.  
Then secondly, you asked, with trepidation.  
Finally, after you asked -  
the third time, you left with the others.

In your mind throughout the night,  
You knew you had done the correct thing.  
Permission was asked, he said go.  
Permission asked again, he said go.  
Three times you asked, he said go.  
Upon your return  
at four a.m., icy stares greeted you at the door.  
"What's wrong?"  
You feared the answer.  
Frost poured from his lips...  
Your come back frozen in your throat.  
As it always was when his anger took hold.  
Icy air filled the room, when he finally gave the order.  
"Go to bed."  
The wintery blast continued  
until he proclaimed you...were not worthy...  
You were not obedient.  
You should never have left without him;  
never walked out. It didn't matter he said go.  
You should have known what was unspoken.  
A good wife wouldn't have gone, even if he had said yes.  
That was a test...That whole exercise - a test  
You failed.  
He had found your weakness, used it as fodder,  
as a catalyst for his amusement.  
Used your fear to strangle you divine soul.  
A flight alone was miserable.  
A flight with one who no longer wanted a life with you;  
One who you had to sit beside  
on the flight home was unbearable.  
His face smirked -  
As he found perverse amusement in your suffering.  
He reveled - basked in his control while you were trapped...  
Trapped for seventeen hours of torture.  
Nowhere to run.  
Nowhere to hide from your agony.

Respite came as an acquittal to your sentence of guilt,  
 when he deemed, your marriage would continue.  
 Relief washed over you at a rather high cost,  
 Which was to be paid over time.  
 The dreams returned. They seemed prescient.  
 A line of cars, parked on the side of the road.  
 Emptied by the rows of women,  
 lovely ladies waiting for a bite,  
 made their way to a white tent.  
 Where she sat, like some kept haram girl...  
 Candi....  
 The prophetic truth in this dream woke you in a sweat.

By that time, religion became your source of strength,  
 Since your life, your existence,  
 it all seemed out of your control.  
 Faith brought solace. You voluntarily hid behind the hijab.  
 Muffled your rebellious streak.  
 New friendships - a new family formed organically  
 American women came together in faith and marriage  
 Oh, but you were not American, it was proclaimed.  
 You must deny your heritage,  
 you are now only a Muslimah - a Muslim woman.  
 Pregnancies seemed coordinated, like musical chairs  
 One by one the babies came.  
 The bond of birth partner, mother and child united you all.  
 With your pregnancy, your position increased...  
 Heaven lies at the foot of the Mother...so they said.

Effort was made to celebrate your sixth anniversary,  
 To make it romantic, you had candlelight,  
 sparkling cider and chocolate covered strawberries.  
 You had convinced yourself you were content in your life -  
 dare...even...love.  
 Yet, that bliss was short lived.  
 Mr. Arab came home sullen, he needed your advice...  
 You would have found joy in that... if it were true.  
 His "friend" had a problem.  
 An affair with an American girl...  
 Now a child...a son...

WARNING! Alternative Facts  
 Oh? A friend?

Yes, a friend. Your spidey sense soared off the charts.  
 It was all denied...Why would the universe stain this now?  
 But, you didn't dare believe  
 your happiness would be impaired yet again.  
 Oh, but the tarnish was black and festered...  
 like acid on steel.  
 there wasn't a friend...Was there?  
 Yes, there was a girl...and a son.  
 Mr. Arab was "the friend"  
 All the gaslighting, now, made sense.  
 A sports car...parked by your house.  
 There she was. The haram girl...Candi  
 Your stomach fell, the nausea twisted your insides,  
 which always occurred with deja vu.  
 How did you know who she was?  
 The dreams - had come to life.  
 She was everywhere. The mosque, the apartment.  
 Everywhere. She watched....waited.  
 Waiting to slip into your  
 life  
 .

The phone rang,  
 "Let me speak to my husband", she announced.  
 Your husband? You hung up.  
 Mr. Arab denied any and all marriage.  
 Wow! A marriage license from Texas...  
 When the anger and betrayal pounded  
 on your already beaten heart  
 Your fingers ached for the release  
 of the ivory and ebony keys.  
 You reach for them.  
 The tactile touch...  
 a whisper on the fingertips  
 fade as ghostly vapor  
 You are left with want and regret  
 Your voice called out  
 for your anguish to be transported  
 to rhythm and harmony  
 But the Arab's voice shattered your desire  
 your longing to play - to sing  
 It is haram - forbidden.  
 Those words pounded deep into your consciousness.

WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!

All those warnings. You kept right on going.  
 What kind of insanity brought you back for more...  
 The need for redemption. For punishment.  
 What egregious sin had you committed?  
 Surely, there had to be a statute of limitations.  
 You began to wonder,  
 Did you get off on the abuse like some submissive kink?  
 Weren't you aware of your own reasoning -  
 Were you that severely emotionally and mentally damaged?

(beat)

The answer to that question was a resounding yes.  
 So much so, you jumped right back in...  
 popped out another kid.  
 They were your world. With these beautiful souls,  
 you were secured heaven at your feet.  
 You would atone for your sins.

WARNING! Bearded men have authority.  
 Those men added a caveat to the placement of heaven.  
 Bearded men in long robes....divided and conquered.  
 You must do as the bearded men say.  
 Oh, but not as we do, fahum; you understand.

Bearded men, who offered prayers  
 of forgiveness and unity- Gathered.  
 Bearded men chose who were to be your friends...  
 There's a bond with these women, all Americans  
 expanded over the years. They were family.  
 In Islam, everyone was brother or sister.  
 With these women, it held a stronger meaning.  
 Each provided comfort and strength  
 During pregnancies and hardships  
 There wasn't anything they wouldn't do for each other.  
 The husbands, the bearded men distrusted  
 These connections,  
 especially when they were the object of the hardship  
 Of these bonds. They plotted to divide and conquer  
 Who decided which of these women would remain  
 You got what was dictated.  
 And you would be happy..joyous even,  
 If you were left with one,  
 To whom you were allowed to speak.

It took evidence of four woman to equal one man.  
 Women were gossips - lacked self-control.  
 Bonds of friendship...broken,  
 separated by an edict from the Imam.  
 Segregated, solace broken, no place to run.

She crosses to the piano sits,  
 places her hands on the keys, but  
 doesn't play

Encouraged by Mr. Arab  
 You denied your name, you became known as Ruquaya.  
 You gave up the very essence of yourself...your name.  
 Your identity was null and void...  
 the former, American self, had been erased;  
 Caved to the edict on women and music  
 A woman's voice cannot be heard through music  
 Your heritage...negated...Hijab, now required  
 Boarded a plane, along with your children for  
 Islamic and Arabic emersion.  
 The complete transformation had occurred.  
 An opportunity to learn everything you could.  
 You were cut off from any form of companionship  
 You concentrate on the education of your children and of  
 yourself.  
 Life in Damascus was interesting.  
 Electricity was shut off from 1 pm to 5 pm every day.  
 Some days the water was shut off for hours.

As you walked with you sister-in-law in Damascus  
 In a park with a statue of Hafez Assad  
 You make a casual remark that what an ass  
 Or something to that affect.  
 You are shushed, "never say anything like that again. You  
 will be killed for that."

Your daughter was the belle of Ruq n al-deen.  
 Shop owners gave her candy and treats.  
 They loved to carry her around the neighborhood.  
 She adored the camera, then.  
 When visa pictures had to be taken,  
 she didn't want to be taken from her adoring friends...  
 Her protestations continued  
 down the street to the photographer's,

until she spied the camera. In a split second.  
 The tears instantly stopped. Eyes dried..  
 She tilted her head...“Chee”th””  
 And all was well in Miss Belle’s little  
 world

.

The Mr. Two Wives made an agreement with Mr. Arab  
 You all stayed in their spare room.  
 There had been a deal made, one to which you were not privy.  
 Friendship found you  
 in the guise of a Syrian General’s family.  
 They embraced you and your children.  
 Hard won respect was given freely.  
 Days were spent, after you walked your son to Islamic school,  
 in the old souk in Damascus,  
 their daughter spent time with you;  
 taught you how to speak Arabic,  
 how to barter, and read signs.  
 This innocuous activity was interpreted as an offense.  
 Somehow, the pursuit of Arabic knowledge brought an onslaught  
 Of suspicion and accusation.  
 That you sought after Syrian men.  
 An affair in Syria, seriously!  
 These allegations began to surface after you denied  
 your husband’s nephew access to your body  
 Mr. Pervert Boy, slid over, sat far too closely,  
 placed his hand behind you.  
 The warmth of his hand could be felt through your abaya.  
 He leaned toward you, his shoulder grazed yours.  
 “My Uncle and I share everything.”  
 He pushed a stray piece of hair back under your hijab.  
 “I mean, everything”  
 You felt your stomach hurl  
 quickly moved to the other side of the room,  
 ..turned, with clenched teeth,  
 Don’t you touch me ever again.  
 As if you would have an affair in a country  
 Where a divorce would be preferred -  
 Greeted with open arms  
 to the punishment that could be exacted.  
 The in-laws tried to interfere with your friendship  
 With Miss General’s daughter

With the premiss of tea and conversation between neighbors  
 Your role as a good Muslim wife and mother were deliberated  
 Their daughter should be kept away.

However, your in-laws left with the General's words  
 "We love Ruquaya. She is like a daughter to us. She is  
 welcomed in our home."

That led to further abuse from the in-laws.

You were left without food

Not only for yourself and children,

But the niece and nephew as well

You ended up selling off you wedding jewelry, piece by piece

The nephew believed himself to be fluent in English

When you called Mrs. First Wife a bitch.

In your defense, the word was used because she constantly  
 complained about you and the kids being in her house.

He translated that to sharmuta or whore.

You, absolutely, did not intend for that definition

Of the word to be used.

The subtle nuances of one word made your life miserable

You remained silent.

You did not open you mouth in defense.

Your narrative - silenced.

You are patient

But, you are not virtuous.

After eight long months in Syria

You're back in the states.

Mr. Arab's daily routine cycled with parades of women.

The haram girl still circled the exterior...

New and exiting toys bounced in and out.

All shapes and sizes, with one unmistakable trait.

Huge ...breasts!

He would travel from town to town...

Bought cars to send overseas.

He would leave for days and weeks

Left you with twenty dollars

to feed yourself and two children.

When You ran out of food,

you begged off your parents.

Mr. Arab, with Mr.GQ, Mr. Mechanic and two others,

made the decision to drive to Florida

in different cars, the premise - sell them in Tampa

He drove alone and hydroplaned off a bridge

Hit a tree. The impact slammed his legs into the transmission, under the console between the front seats. You had transferred any calls from you phone to your parents A nurse called... Mr. Arab was hurt... An accident...both legs broken. You hate to admit, thoughts of his impending death and widowhood played like a VHS tape in your mind. The universe played another fast one. Knee crushed, compound fracture...both legs in casts. His untimely death had been averted... Would you have to take care of him... An invalid...forever? Admittedly, not a virtuous thought. Again, you aren't virtuous.

His injuries ...though not terminal a challenge in the split level apartment, with all bathrooms on the second level. After many sleepless nights, you had enough. You made sure he was comfortable...You found sleep... with the help of Vicodin you swiped from his meds. You woke to his bellowing... You run downstairs - on the last stairs, you fall to the floor laughing. There, two white plastered legs Stuck straight in the air above the recliner. K

Mr. Arab was not amused. You hadn't laughed that hard in years, tears slid down your face. While he convalesced, he was at his best behavior Butter couldn't melt in his mouth... "What would He do without you?" "He would be lost." Blah blah blah. The minute those casts were off...back to gigantic tatas.

He needed away from the Oklahoma cold. Florida...the perfect place. He could ship the cars. Everything was bright and wonderful in Florida. The kids were five and three. You got a teaching job... at the Islamic school;

first, as a kindergarten assistant,  
then your own second grade class.  
Your resumé brought you notice... your degree in music.  
Music had been everything to you...a lifetime ago.  
Questions flooded your brain, why were they doing this?  
Was this....a test? What was the correct answer?  
Wasn't music haram/forbidden from a woman?  
This proved the first step where your silence...  
Your unspoken questions remained unanswered.  
You throw yourself into the kids.  
Yet, your voice craved to sing.  
When the songs were taught  
instead of demonstrated and sung  
a cassette was played.  
This tortured you...daily.

Even though your children loved each other  
they loved to torture each other  
to test their limits, even more.  
Their favorite past-times were to watch Disney movies  
and the 10th anniversary of Les Miserables.  
Do you hear the people sings?  
Yes...  
Everyone but you.  
Why would this god give a woman a voice  
if she wasn't allowed to use it?  
Why blessed - yet  
denied  
?

Both kids would sit without a sound  
as they watched the concert  
Then asked for you to play it again...and again.  
They had no idea how much you longed to sing those words.  
On one occasion, during a horrible migraine  
You woke, to a pink foaming  
substance out of your daughters nose.  
After you panic for a few seconds,  
thoughts of her brain melting replayed in you mind  
As you sped toward the ER,  
where they found that all it was...  
florescent pink play dough.

Her Blonde curls, always worn in a top pony  
 bounced around the house  
 She was a prissy thing, loved her dresses;  
 always had matching socks with her patent leather Mary Janes.  
 One day, she ran into your room crying.  
 Saris, neither could say F's when they were little;  
 "Saris cut my hair" You look at her hair,  
 it was still in the pony-tail on top of her head.  
 No, he didn't cut your hair.  
 She quizzically asked, "Saris joke me?"  
 Yes, he joked you.  
 As she walked away, you reached up to pat her head  
 the pony-tail came off in your hands.  
 Mr. Arab thought someone had been murdered  
 by the way you screamed for him.  
 "Look what your son did"

Writing was your outlet...research...  
 Judaism, Christianity, and Islam  
 You had left Christianity, how was Islam any different?  
 This is a question you hoped your research would answer.  
 The library at University of South Florida,  
 proved a wealth of text and information - Pentateuch, Torah.  
 As did the Jewish women's league.  
 The information found turned to doubts of faith

Politically, the community in Tampa changed.  
 Strong words were said in the mosque.  
 Words of death to America. Death to Israel  
 Were last said during the khutbah (sermon)  
 when one bearded man left with his family  
 to take the power as leader in Palestine.  
 As you sat with the other women,  
 your eyes glanced from face to face  
 for some hint of disbelief, some objection.  
 Yet, no objection voiced. Only deference.  
 You were asked...  
 You were asked as an American Muslimah,  
 for your loyalty to Islam and the community.  
 "refute facts...we didn't know anything...  
 when the family left  
 it was a shock to the entire community...

"No one knew what his plans were."  
 "He was only known as a scholar"  
 Dinner had been taken, in this man's home.  
 His wife...your friend....  
 both teachers in the Islamic school.  
 How could they ask you this?  
 Was gaslighting a cultural construct?  
 Scowls lined their brow with your negative response.  
 How could you stand as an American and lie to the press.  
 The truth was known long before he left.  
 When people underestimate you, they lose  
 You know more than you say, think more than you speak  
 and you notice more than they realized.  
 What wasn't known was your knowledge of Arabic.  
 That bearded man's ideas were known...you knew this.  
 They all knew.

Teaching music was enough. It had to be enough...  
 A substitute... Your hand touched the notes.  
 Like a bicycle ridden after many years.  
 To further tempt the fates,  
 your friend and violinist, visited.  
 Musical conversations invoked the fire of song.  
 Teaching wasn't enough. Your fingers longed to play.  
 Your voice longed to sing.  
 It was a hunger that couldn't be satisfied with tofu.  
 The music in you was a caged animal - needed freedom.  
 With eleven years of no use, cobwebs had formed  
 The croaking sound emitted from your vocal chords  
 Did not bode well for any song.

You started from the beginning.  
 Like an athlete, you couldn't jump in feet first.  
 With your meager salary,  
 music books and a Casio piano - purchased.  
 warm-ups and practice, drills and exercises  
 Next steps... a vocal coach. But, where?  
 Singing was prohibited, especially by women,  
 no one had any references.  
 You found three vocal coaches in the yellow pages  
 only one answered the call  
 You took the plunge.  
 Made the appointment.

While the kids were with friends, you made your way.  
 A block from the studio, you pulled in a parking  
 lot...removed your hijab.  
 A momentous occasion, six years...six year with hijab  
 Now gone.  
 Nerves took over as you walked  
 into the unassuming building...  
 Armed with Les Miserable and The Phantom of the Opera  
 (beat)  
 Go big or go home!  
 You made an impression,  
 Invitations for musical theater workshop and the Opera  
 Company.

How were you going to pay for this? Nothing, she replied.  
 Nothing? Your first attempt at singing in eleven years.  
 Your vocal training had been strictly classical.  
 Musical theater a stretch.  
 The weekend of the workshop - changed everything.  
 New friendships were formed  
 Duets with a charming actor,  
 Who introduced you to new cast recordings.  
 Rent, Passion, Falsettos blasted from his BMW.  
 Between Rigoletto rehearsals and voice classes  
 Your heart was light - the eleven wasted years a memory.

On one of Mr. Arab's trips "to buy cars"  
 his pager kept beeping... over and over  
 You saw the number on the little green screen  
 Told yourself, admonished yourself...don't call it.  
 Yet, you did anyway.  
 It had to be important for someone to call so many times.  
 Mr. Arab's M.O. never changed over all those years.  
 This supposed innocent woman knew nothing of his wife  
 Or children. She swore she was not aware.  
 The last straw...you'd left him behind  
 After weeks away, Mr. Arab returned  
 With bags in hand, he was met with pronouncement of divorce.  
 An Islamic divorce is final with three decrees.  
 If any intimacy is performed between any of the parties  
 The process either began again with a new announcement  
 Or it is completely forgotten.  
 He took it as a challenge to force his way

Your screams stopped Mr. Arab in his tracks.  
I DIVORCE YOU!  
You were treated like an option.  
So you left him like a choice.  
You can never go back to before.  
On the phone call, your Mother had a brilliant idea,  
the kids could go live with your sister.  
Like that was the perfect solution.  
She was so proud of her plan.  
You could go and do your acting thing.  
You weren't a good parent.  
You were inept on your own without a man.

Incidents, first written off as bad luck...  
Car wouldn't start, which only he could fix.  
When the young actor performed in Evita.  
Your first cast party...  
Car won't start... You weren't hindered.  
Many actors offered rides.  
Not only were these the first after parties,  
Alcohol hadn't touched your lips in over eleven years.  
Copious amounts served as your re-introduction.  
Since you were without wheels  
along with your inability to see straight  
one of the actors placed you in his car  
dropped you at your door.  
You crawled to your bed... At five a.m.  
A few hours of sleep until Rigoletto rehearsals.

Seven a.m., the phone rang. You turned the ringer off.  
Your alcohol induced dreams incorporated the pounding.  
What the hell was that? Go away!  
An hour later...  
Oh for Christ sake... More banging!  
You made it to the door, this time.  
Mr. Arab pushed his way in.  
You back away...  
He wanted to know who was that guy? "Did that guy touch you?"  
Confusion lobbed around inside your skull.  
Your brain still muddled under the influence,  
What guy? Your brain registered the questions.  
No, he was gay.

Mr. Arab started to ramble.  
You Americans are all alike.  
Did you remember, his friend Ali,  
with the American wife?  
You nodded, barely...you saw her a handful of times.  
He continued his anecdote...  
His tone was cold  
He measured every single word...stared into your eyes...  
a blank cold stare...his voice like ice crystals.  
You stood frozen in his hatred.  
As he returned to his tale....  
Ali and Stephanie were divorced...  
You nodded in agreement.  
She got with an American guy...drove Ali insane.  
Went to her house...knocked on the door...  
When she opened it...  
Ali stood there with a pistol in hand and pulled the trigger.  
She is paralyzed. Ali is in prison.  
Mr. Arab went further - he would do the same to you,  
Only he would not be afraid of prison.  
If he missed and you did not die  
Prison would not hold his anger and revenge.  
He would hunt you down.  
He would tear you to pieces...  
Limb by limb  
Once the description of your death was concluded  
He walked out - slammed the door behind him.

She crosses to the piano. Stares at  
the keys - plays one note. She  
stays at the piano

There weren't any notes to convey this moment.  
No rhythms to counter the palpitations.  
Nothing to still the tremors.  
Your hands trembled...they wouldn't stop.  
You couldn't find your phone. Who could you call?  
Instinct reverted to childhood.  
Phone rang twice.... Your mother answered.  
All the sordid details relayed...She called your sister.  
Within five minutes the phone rang.

Your sister, Her first words...call the police.  
You did... When they arrived...  
Anxiety was completely overwhelming...  
How did you get into this  
place  
?

With kindness they questioned you.  
They interrogated him as well.  
They knew he would do what he promised.  
One said they couldn't tell you to leave town,  
But, encouraged you to pack your things and disappear.  
The other... brought in the kids.  
It didn't take long to pack the clothes and some toys.  
But, what to do with the rest...  
the apartment, the cat, the rest of your belongings.  
You, mentally, went through the women you knew.  
Only one person, who wasn't part of the community  
Only one could keep a secret and help....  
Though married to an Arab, she had never converted.  
An Arabic Stepford wife, she was not.  
She immediately came to your rescue. You were assured...  
Your belongings and your cat would be care for. Don't worry  
As children they didn't know why you were running.  
Never asked why. Everything was accepted in stride.  
You were going to visit your sister.  
It was all a grand adventure.  
Two flights later...you arrived in Texas.  
Greeted by your sister. The kids were ecstatic.  
When their excitement dissipated... sleepy eyes closed to  
dream on the road to New Mexico.  
With gratitude you watch the flat,  
brown land speed past to their soft snores

You held such fondness for Clovis, New Mexico.  
Just kidding... It was brown...every inch brown.  
Rules and instructions were laid down.  
If the Arab showed up, call the base.  
Soldiers were instructed - you were the Majors sister.  
Everyone on base knew she was to be contacted  
immediately if the call occurred.  
Enrolled son in school... instructed school,  
only you or your sister could check him out.

No one else... no one.  
Shortly, after you arrived in the vibrant city of Clovis.  
A constant barrage of calls began to come in.  
Phishing for information.  
A constant barrage of calls began  
The phone rang... click  
It rang...click...rang again - click.  
Day after day.

Your friend called...  
queried if you gave her the wrong key.  
Were the locks changed?  
You instantly knew what had occurred. He broke in....  
Mr. Arab took all your belongings...  
The cat? ... no clue.  
He had access to your address book.  
Why hadn't you taken it with you?  
With that book, he had access to all your friends and family  
Then you also realized....your phone bill  
Left on the kitchen counter, waiting to be paid.  
Your fears weren't uncalled for.  
As you found with each phone call  
Yes, he had called...  
begged for your location.  
...harassed...then threatened...  
He must have gone through every number...  
When he found your sister's after a couple of weeks.  
You were the unfortunate person to answer.

The Arabs words to you were far removed  
from those spoken just two weeks before.  
The casual tone betrayed the iciness of the threats,  
when he last spoke  
You are ill prepared for Mr. Arab's, almost, anxious tone.  
As if, by some remote chance,  
he actually felt guilty for his words or actions.  
This would be a marked contrast to the man you knew.  
You again, feel betrayed by your feeble reaction of civility.  
His words bounce off you like pong on a computer screen.  
You concentrate on the painting on your sisters wall  
To keep you mind off his voice.  
You heard him say he was sick...  
the doctors think it's cancer.

This snapped you out of the watercolors into you own body.  
 Anger registered, oh so subtly, at first...builds to rage.  
 He was not sick...you knew this.  
 You called him on his pathetic dishonesty.  
 His sickening cold tone returns as he said,  
 "They are my children".  
 The receiver fell from your shaking fingers  
 You quickly grabbed it off the floor to hung up.  
 Words careen through you mind's eye...  
 He knows where you are. You aren't safe anymore.  
 These words echo...scream at you. You were on the sofa  
 Rocked yourself - like an infant  
 as if that would give you comfort.  
 Or solace in your fear.  
 That is how your sister found you  
 when she came home from the base.  
 You recount the conversation.  
 She nodded and reminded you  
 The Arab didn't know where she lived.  
 Yes, he knew the state,  
 The town...street...house were still unknown...Relax.

How can you relax? You couldn't get through the day...  
 the night without anxiety and depression...  
 they took hold...Buried themselves deep into your psyche.  
 They played games with you.  
 Threw all your worries and fears in your face.  
 How could you be calm, when your nerves shook so strongly  
 Parkinson's symptoms flashed before your eyes.  
 Could fear trigger it? Could PTSD?  
 Mirrors betrayed your age as you walked into the room,  
 The face could not be a thirty-three year old.  
 That woman looked pale, sickly even.  
 Dark circles drawn through sleepless nights  
 Outlined the sunken colorless cheeks.  
 All enjoyment had been erased from your life,  
 the new found enemy - food.  
 You stopped  
 eating

.

To add insult to injury, your son,  
 Couldn't grasp the concepts taught in the public school

Teaching styles between a private school were far different than public.

There must be an intellectual issue with the child - obviously the situation said child found himself in, couldn't be a catalyst. His world was torn apart. His mother a broken shell.

Your sister tried to get your mind off the Arab. Introductions were made to Captains and Majors. One said Navigator did prove distracting for a moment; for a few days. Until the call you had feared came to fruition. He found where you were. The school kept the Arab ex in the office. Instructed you to drive to the back of the school and take your son from the back door. You hung up with the principal... made the call to the base. Two words spoken by the soldier, "yes, ma'am. " The base - thirty minutes from town, your sister pulled in at ten minutes from the initial call. You pulled into the school grabbed your son and ran. Unbeknownst to you... Mr. Arab watched as you left the school.

The field across from your sister's house had always been empty. When a car parked there it was hard not to notice. It was a scene right out of a Steven King thriller. For two days the same car pulled into the field - sat there all day. You felt like a prisoner in yet another cage. Your sleep deprived imagination, played multiple scenarios. If you step outside the door, He rammed the car into you, backed over you... back and forth, back and forth. He stabbed you. His perception of the events, you ran into his knife... Ran into his knife ten times. He shot you in the head...the car pulled out from the field as you step out of the house...shot in a drive by. You lay in a pool of your own blood. Your life snuffed out by your own husband.

For three days the car parked in that lot  
Then, a knock on the door  
Your heart bottomed out....a free fall to the floor.  
The officer at the door responded  
to a report that a woman  
at the premises had a psychotic break  
and a danger to herself and to her children.  
You...you were that woman...  
A psychotic break?  
In your mind, you screamed -  
I'm not crazy!

You reach for the calming of piano keys found  
Nothing

No, officer, you kindly replied. Depressed, yes.  
Traumatized - yes.  
Angry - yes.  
Psychotic no.  
To that, the portly officer asked...  
Was there a gun in the house?  
Your sister politely smiled...not answering in words.  
The policeman nodded and left.  
You never believed your life would be like this train wreck.  
The first divorce was....still a nightmare.  
What kind of messed up karmic debt  
did you amass in your previous life?  
Screw patience. You'll never be virtuous.

Mr. Arab continued to park across the street;  
Called continuously  
When your sister left for the base  
he knocked on the door...demanded to see the kids.  
Even though he knew your son was in school.  
You paid a toll for all the constant badgering  
No sleep, nothing you could eat.  
You had nothing. No money...no job.

An attorney retained - a restraining order filed.  
Once again, a courtroom scene appeared.  
Mr. polite Arab turned on the charm.

He sat smiling smugly on one side of the small room.  
A random benign thought popped into your feeble brain...  
Court rooms are so much smaller in person, than on TV.  
A serious looking judge called the Arab to the bench  
His testimony would be heard.  
But, of course, they had to start with his warped perception,  
His version.  
The man's voice.  
You sat there, on that uncomfortable wooden bench,  
quietly, unable to master the resting bitch face,  
your emotions are projected,  
visibly written on your face...  
His solemn oath of truth,  
brought a chuckle, as your eyes rolled.  
Could one sprain their eyes if rolled to hard?  
No your honor, he didn't know why his wife would run away.  
No your honor, everything had been normal at home.  
No your honor...no your honor...No your honor!  
Anger and disbelief drained all color from your face.  
You were dangerous to yourself and your children.  
Then it was your turn  
His eyes, you felt, followed you to the witness seat.  
As you sat down, your eyes are purposely  
averted away from him.  
Questions from the judge led you to counter his testimony.  
You opposed his rendition of the events...  
He sabotaged your car.  
His death threats...  
When asked to counter the Arab's version  
That you left without cause.  
You calmly looked at the judge,  
why would you give up everything -  
your part in Rigoletto, your job, your friends...  
Why walk away from everything and come... No offense.  
To this god forsaken place without a reason?  
A restraining order was granted for you  
You caught the Arab's eye from across the courtroom  
The final proclamation, to end the bond  
I Divorce You!  
Useless... He had rights with the children...  
He never threatened them... only you.  
He loved his children. The fruit of his loins.  
He only wanted YOU dead.

You were less than nothing to him.  
You were the law abiding citizen in this equation,  
The door opened when he knocked  
On the Arab's face a frozen glare and pompous sneer.  
His mission...accomplished...  
His nemesis...You...brought to heel.  
Mr. Arab left the vacant lot and drove away.  
Legalities became the topic of phone conversations.  
Your son hadn't made improvements in school...  
He missed the Islamic School.  
For the sake of the kids, you agree to joint custody.  
Oh how he must have laughed at your naiveté.

In the following weeks you found relief  
In the world wide web.  
Unmistakable tones of connection  
eased your lack of self worth.  
You were starved of love..  
Yet you did not feel it...  
You didn't acknowledge the anguish of need.  
like a refugee during famine,  
no longer felt the pangs of hunger.  
Emptiness wasn't felt...  
But, it was there...hidden behind the anger and depression...  
waited to rear its ugly head.  
Emptiness must be filled... Must be satisfied.  
There wasn't employment to support retail therapy.  
Online chat rooms were filled with like minds  
Hearts vying for a little respite from the ache  
From the numbness... the longing for connection.

Group chats, turned to private rooms,  
To phone calls...you began to crave contact.  
It became a desperate need.  
Promises made and expressed,  
by a man fifteen years older.  
filled that need.  
With your broken spirit,  
your children and one suitcase you headed to Virginia.  
Traded a gilded cage for metal.  
Walked right in...handed him the key.  
You celebrated your new found freedom dietary restrictions  
with a bacon cheese burger

OH MY GOD...Orgasmic  
Which marked your complete separation from Islam.

Gated communities kept the riffraff out.  
Or so you thought.  
Mr. Rent-a-cop, deep in his donuts  
fell under Mr. Arab's spell...Didn't pay attention  
let him drive in behind you.  
His car blocked you in the driveway  
Visions of his threats rendered you motionless.  
Until, he shook you awake with his command  
"Give him the kids...Now."  
Or he would call his lawyer.  
Your "friend" was worthless in his ability to defend you.  
Mr. Arab ex snarled while you headed inside...  
retrieved the children.  
He put them in his car and left...  
You went to your car to lock it...  
You see a package in the back seat.  
He must have placed it there  
While you were inside with the children  
Your "friend" kept you from the car.  
While he called the Rent-a-cop.  
Putting him on blast...his offense?  
How could the cop just have waved the Arab through.  
The point of a gated community was to have kept him out.  
Mr. Rent-a-cop, apologetically, arrived.  
Called the Sheriff, when he saw the package.  
Since they had to deal with an Arab...  
The events snowballed... Sheriff called bomb squad.  
While the bomb-squad dealt with the package  
Mr. Arab called you home phone.  
He threatened when the kids are secured...  
He would come after  
you

.

You tried to gain a small morsel of normalcy.  
You walked through the day to day..  
get a job. You call the Arab ex, talked to the kids.  
Then letters and packages started coming.  
He used the United Postal Service as his conduit for torture.  
Broken pieces of wine glasses...

Torn fragments of your comparative religion manuscript  
Paragraph by paragraph...  
Correspondence came once...  
Sometimes twice a week...  
It seemed he relished in his attempts to frighten you  
He wrote, "There was a part of the woods without a fence."  
He described what you wore as you stood on the deck.  
He knew how to get past the gate.  
Weeks upon weeks upon weeks..,  
Of letters...photos of the kids...  
Letters to your friends. Letters to your family.  
Every day... "you deserve to die. You will go to hell.  
You are worse than swine.  
They are his children now."  
He would make you suffer.

You called the Islamic school...  
spoke with the receptionist.  
You were friends...once  
You were family...of a sort.  
Her daughter married Mr. Arab's nephew.  
At first she felt sorry for you  
The kids were still there...  
Then later said she had been instructed  
Not to take your calls.  
The , you could no longer call them.  
The phone number didn't work anymore...  
Out of service...  
You panic...  
you are now working at a day care center...  
Seven fifty an hour.. yeah that will cover a lot....  
You give every cent you have  
Every single penny, for a lawyer in Florida.  
When she asked for everything Mr. Arab sent...  
You forwarded it all.  
You knew he was going to split.  
Lawyers didn't listen...  
The FBI didn't listen.  
HE IS GOING TO TAKE THEM AWAY!  
You screamed in the phone.  
The lawyer took your money...  
Did nothing.  
No one listened. No one cared.

Why won't they listen?

(beat)

Information...

Information was key.

The FBI wanted a witness.

You wanted your children.

But, the information was much more important to them.

What did you hear?

How much do you know? Who did you know?

Was Mr. Arab a part of the groups in Palestine?

Did he send money to Palestine?

You don't care enough to tell  
them..

.

School was out... They were gone.

For months you kept the things they left behind.

Her Little Mermaid sleeping bag, his Toy Story

His Woody action figure.

Her Pocahontas doll.

Their rooms remained untouched.

Until your "friend" suggested...

No, directed you to clean it out.

You stepped out of the cage.

Closed the door and never looked back.

You regained a portion of your voice.

FADE

ACT III

A new chapter began...  
Wrote a new story.  
Changed course.  
Change didn't come easy.  
You were left with nothing.  
No skills. No job. No home.  
Darkness was gone... now there would be light.  
Or so you thought.  
Since burying you feelings and life  
Behind barriers, a new avenue opened up  
In the guise of Elizabethan garb.  
Bawdy weekends of hard cider, men with swords  
Free thinkers, turkey legs and Celtic music...  
a renaissance hippy commune.

Time passed...one day into the next.  
Birthdays always triggered outward reactions.  
First grade photos were missing -  
threw you into an obsidian cloud.  
There were moments of panic  
when dreams...no nightmares invade your sleep...  
an international flight...  
Bearded men hijack the plane...  
You sensed a familiarity with one of the hijackers...  
Who turned to face you  
A knife pointed at your throat.  
Your mouth dropped in horror...  
It felt like the shock stopped your heart.  
His dark, almost black eyes...filled...  
No, were empty...Nothing...no emotion...a black hole  
His Icy stare chilled you to the bone.  
Though, now grown into a man,  
those eyes were the same shape as your own,  
Glared, looked fixedly...this bearded face of your son.  
Confusion echoed onto your reflection in his eyes.  
You try to protest...a questioning look crosses your face...  
as the warmth of your blood  
poured from the wound in your neck...  
You were so fixated on the beard man...your son  
his hand flicked forward without your notice.

Blackness closed in on you...  
You wake up... drenched in sweat...shivering  
Those eyes remained in the back of your mind..

Your career took off. You found a niche.  
For the first time you are able to support yourself  
now, finally an independent woman.  
You had everything you had hoped for  
yet, a vehicle with Oklahoma or Florida plates  
sent you into a panic.  
Hearing Arabic in a grocery store caused anxiety attacks.  
When you left the restaurant...your peripheral vision caught  
An edge of a plate....an Oklahoma tag, with its Native logo.  
Strange...the hair on the back of you neck felt electric  
Raised your eyes...the Arab ex's nephew?...no it couldn't be  
He looked up as he opened the car door.  
Realization hit you as you turned and bolted to your car.  
Mr. Arab knew where you were...  
Your eyes glanced in the rear view...  
No one followed...  
Maybe, you had hallucinated this entire scenario...  
Or maybe his gaze hadn't registered...who you were.  
Suspicion played ping pong in your head.  
Why of all the fifty states would his nephew  
.be in Herndon, Virginia? Could it be just a coincidence?  
An internet search proved that it definitely was not.  
A people search for a mere twenty-five dollars  
gave a wealth of information.  
This is how he found you  
A simple paid search on the internet  
gave him all the information he needed.  
Your search information compared to his nephews information  
His nephew lived in every city you had for the past ten  
years. Just months after your address changed,  
his address showed, so did his.  
This knowledge, in no way appeased your anxiety.  
There wasn't anywhere to run and hide

You knew you couldn't continue as you were  
Sent to the precipice whenever a spattering of Arabic was  
heard or a car that triggered a memory.  
At the time you didn't have the means to find a solution.  
Determined to not let this fear control you

With your new found freedom and job  
 you rekindled your first passion...music.  
 From musicals and opera to Celtic.  
 From Renaissance Faires to Celtic festivals,  
 you honed your skills.  
 Music, notes and lyrics kept flowing through  
 as if a dam had been released.  
 Twelve years of compositions broke out.  
 Page after page, note after note;  
 songs of pain, joy, sadness, love, hate  
 Music eased the pain, tore down the walls.  
 You take the first poem written in Saudi Arabia  
 Composed the music.  
 It was the first song on your freshmen CD, Bard Song.

She crosses to the piano and begins  
 to play.

TRACES OF TIME  
 (singing)

YOU HAD LOCKED ME IN A CAGE  
  
 YOU HAD CHAINED ME TO THE WALL  
  
 MY WILL TO BREAK FREE KEPT ME STRONG  
  
 YOU SAID MY LIFE WAS YOURS,  
  
 MY LAND WAS NOT MY OWN  
  
 YOUR HAND HELD THE KEY TO MY SOUL  
  
 SEE WITH YOUR HEART  
  
 HEAR WITH YOUR SOUL  
  
 THE TRACES OF TIME MARKED MY JOURNEY HOME  
  
 THE LINES ON MY FACE SHOWED  
  
 THE MAPS OF TEARS  
  
 THAT LEAD ME TO MY HOME  
  
 CAN YOU SEE MY HANDS WERE TIED

CAN YOU FEEL MY PAIN AND GRIEF  
ARE YOU SURE MY LIFE IS OVER  
AS YOU LOOK UPON MY FACE  
LOOK INTO MY EYES SEE ME AS I AM  
I AM SO VERY MUCH LIKE YOU  
SEE WITH YOUR HEART  
HEAR WITH YOUR SOUL  
THE TRACES OF TIME MARK MY JOURNEY HOME  
THE LINES ON MY FACE SHOW THE MAPS OF TEARS  
THAT LEAD ME TO MY HOME  
AS YOU WALK ALONG THE ROAD  
AS YOU TRAVEL ON YOUR WAY  
LOOK INTO THEIR FACES  
CAN YOU HEAR THE WORDS THEY SAY  
LISTEN TO THE HEARTACHE  
SEE THE MILES OF TEARS  
SHADOWS OF THE LIFE THEY LEFT BEHIND  
SEE WITH YOUR HEART  
HEAR WITH YOUR SOUL  
THE TRACES OF TIME MARK MY JOURNEY HOME  
THE LINES ON MY FACE SHOW THE MAPS OF TEARS  
THAT LEAD ME TO MY HOME

Independence became your focus...independence and music  
Your love of Celtic music led you to the Arthurian legend  
which led you further to the divine feminine.

Previously, your spiritual journey had been tied to either family or a man.

Without, faith you felt aimless, without support.

What was out there? Judaism and Islam,

no other patriarchal belief system filled your purpose.

The divine feminine filled a longing never experienced.

The goddess - a belief that sang to the core of

Feminine sovereignty.

A tradition that ran contrary to the other belief systems

Many of the traditions were snuffed out

by the patriarchal systems

Goddesses Rhiannon, Branwen, Blodeuwedd,

gave those who are wounded to face those shadows.

Out of this immersion a band formed,

Rhianon, she was your Goddess...

The mother aspect of the divine feminine.

Where Rhiannon's son -- taken from her

And accused of murdering him.

Yours were taken...Rhiannon's bond - a mother's bond.

#### RHIANNON

RHIANNON RODE A WHITE HORSE

RODE IT THROUGH THE WHITE FOAM

STARLINGS SINGING SWEETLY

CALLING ALL OF US HOME

RHIANNON, RHIANNON

COME TAKE ME HOME

RHIANNON BORE A BURDEN

BORE IT LIKE NO OTHER

RHIANNON HOLY SOVEREIGN

RHIANNON HOLY MOTHER

RHIANNON, RHIANNON

COME TAKE ME HOME

WE'LL RIDE ON THE NINTH WAVE FOAM

WE'LL RIDE ON THE NINTH WAVE FOAM

WE'LL RIDE ON THE NINTH WAVE FOAM

THAT TAKES US HOME

RHIANNON, RHIANNON

COME TAKE ME HOME

WE'LL RIDE ON THE NINTH WAVE FOAM

WE'LL RIDE ON THE NINTH WAVE FOAM

WE'LL RIDE ON THE NINTH WAVE FOAM

THAT TAKES US HOME

RHIANNON, RHIANNON

RHIANNON, RHIANNON

COME TAKE ME HOME

Appropriate, that you found solace in her mythology.  
Friend's met provided a safe place  
And a lifetime family.  
This also brought new exploration into spirituality  
A voyage into the divine feminine.  
With your spiritual sisters  
The journey to find what kept you from your divine self  
The actualization of who you were meant to be.  
Shadows that had held you down,

Locked in your own cage, were confronted  
 What you didn't understand, the main point of confrontation  
 The universe used it to make you realize  
 Your shadows weren't finished, yet.

You became more and more obsessed with Ireland  
 Her mythology and legends.  
 Ireland's once golden pagan past  
 chased to extinction as snakes  
 When you expressed to your best friend the need  
 for a vacation, a trip to Ireland  
 Her first response - "Sounds like an amazing vacation.  
 You're not going alone."  
 To this her boyfriend said...  
 "you two aren't going without me."  
 This was the first flight, for you, overseas in a decade  
 As the plane flew into Irish airspace  
 you couldn't help yourself but to sing  
 Fields of Athenry  
 From the minute your feet touched Irish soil  
 you didn't know if you believed in reincarnation  
 But, the familiarity to this land come flooding in...  
 A feeling of home  
 Touristy spots weren't on the list of sites  
 Only those tied to the old ways,  
 well other than the Guinness factory that is.

The first stop,  
 after checking into the Manor house in county Meath,  
 a drive to County Louth and Cuchulain's stone.  
 The directions you had to the stone took you  
 to the middle of the Irish countryside in county Louth.  
 You come to a crossroads. To the right,  
 in the middle of nowhere stood a pub.  
 A local older Irishman, complete with fedora and tweed  
 jacket, the quintessential Irishman  
 gave directions to Cuchulainn's Stone  
 With a fabulous Irish brogue he proved quite the story teller  
 "Aaah, Cuchulain...aye. It is just down the road, in the  
 center of the field. In the corner of that field a small  
 cottage where my family lived. I grew up there.  
 Come I'll show ya.

You followed him down the road  
 After a quarter of a mile, he jogs down the ditch  
 Then up to a small break in the green weeds  
 With a merry smile he pointed to the field on the  
 Other side of the fence. He left you with these words  
 "Follow the lei lines and there it will be."  
 The three of us climbed over the fence  
 and up the hill.  
 There the stone stood, nothing else on that hill.  
 The field was bare, but for a small batch of trees  
 surrounding a small, one room building,  
 where once the old gentleman had grown up,  
 now shelter for farm animals.  
 Where Cuchulain, the hound of Connor MacNessa,  
 during his last battle, tied himself  
 and continued fighting the enemy till his last breath.

Every day for six days a different site or stone circle.  
 One such circle, the Grange Circle,  
 stood since the Bronze Age.  
 Trees, whose seeds had grown  
 large enough to ensconce the stones  
 within their trunks like objects from a Tolkien novel.  
 A path between stones had been etched  
 Out over hundreds of years to form the path.  
 Two taller stones stood at the obvious entrance to the  
 enormous circle.  
 Once within the circle you could hear  
 the murmurings of the past, which changed  
 in your mind and memory to words and music of Ireland.  
 Her loss of the old ways.

#### THIS IRISH LAND

THIS IRISH LAND SITS IN GREEN SPLENDOR  
 HAUNTING TUNES OF THE AGES ECHO IN RHYME  
 GRAY FIGURES SPIN AND TWIRL IN THE SKY  
 SHADOWS OF BONFIRES STAND IN THE NIGHT  
 THIS IS IRISH LAND CRIES IN THE NIGHT

THIS IRISH LAND WON'T GIVE UP THE FIGHT  
 SHE LIVES FOR HER PEOPLE  
 SHE LIVES FOR HER PRIDE  
 THIS IRISH LAND CRIES IN THE NIGHT  
 HER STONES CRY OUT  
 FOR THE CHANTS OF THE ELDERS  
 CARRYING HER SONG TO THE CLOUDS  
 THE SONG OF THE ANCIENTS  
 THE ALTER IS BARE  
 THIS IRISH LAND CRIES IN THE NIGHT  
 THIS IRISH LAND WON'T GIVE UP THE FIGHT  
 SHE LIVES FOR HER PEOPLE  
 SHE LIVES FOR HER PRIDE  
 THIS IRISH LAND CRIES IN THE  
 NIGH  
 T

The time had come for you to leave this magical place  
 The universe saw to give you respite for three extra days  
 with an airline strike, rooms and food paid by the airline.  
 After those three days tears were shed  
 they were shed for Ireland. They were shed for yourself  
 now the fairytale had ended, reality of life had to be met...  
 dealt with.

As you looked back on those chapters,  
 those episodes of your life...  
 flashes of comprehension brushed,  
 yet bounced off...never made their mark.

You let it happen...like an observer  
 You were a stranger in your own life  
 Allowed it all to happen  
 You were mute...tongue cut out  
 A useless piece of flesh  
 The question remained  
 were you willing to confront that aspect of yourself  
 and reclaim your sovereignty?

She crosses to the piano, begins  
 playing Walls.

Healing all those wounds - a rough road  
 As you immersed yourself into confronting those shadows  
 That held you down for decades -  
 your father, your mother  
 Your exes, even though you look on all of them,  
 so fondly...those heads in jars in the basement.  
 You walk the labyrinth, the drum beats a rhythmic time  
 to the cadence of your walk - transported you inward  
 Spiral-led to the center where the pain had gathered to  
 fester.  
 A life barred from anyone; a chasm so wide no one could cross  
 This crevasse, you realized blocked a monumental wall,  
 a turret around yourself, the walls were impenetrable.  
 In your minds eye, you watched as your friends  
 And your children begged to reach you  
 This brought excruciating pain, tears fell heavily  
 down your cheeks, you stood there and soundlessly wept.  
 This was the first step in battling the victim mentality,  
 the second, a therapist procured  
 made the conclusion that all of this,  
 everything that happened was all because of you.  
 You wanted the pain and trauma.  
 Remember back when you had those thoughts yourself,  
 the words, perverted kink, had escaped your thought.  
 Those words were a slap in your face.  
 Yes, you had been through a lot of trauma and abuse from a young age.  
 Yes, the angry outbursts triggered  
 memories of your father's abuse,  
 your uncle, your mother, the Arab, the long list of abusers.  
 Stopping the cycle of abuse had been your mission.  
 In order to stop the cycle, the walls had to come down.

The only thing you could do is...

PULL IT TOGETHER,  
THOUGH I'D RATHER  
KNOW I'M STRONG ENOUGH  
WHEN TIMES ARE ROUGH.  
HERE IN THESE WALLS.  
TEAR DOWN THE WALLS  
LET THEM CRUMBLE; LET THEM FALL  
JUST TEAR DOWN THE WALLS  
LET ME FEEL AGAIN.  
TEAR DOWN THE WALLS.  
I DON'T NEED THEM NOW  
JUST TEAR DOWN TEAR DOWN THE WALLS.  
INSIDE THIS TOWER I'M HERE FOR HOURS,  
WHERE NO ONE FINDS WHAT I HIDE INSIDE.  
HERE IN THESE WALLS.  
TEAR DOWN THE WALLS,  
LET THEM CRUMBLE; LET THEM FALL.  
JUST TEAR DOWN THE WALLS LET ME FEEL AGAIN.  
TEAR DOWN THE WALLS.  
I DON'T NEED THEM NOW  
JUST TEAR DOWN TEAR DOWN THE WALLS.  
MY HEART'S IN PIECES,

JAGGED ON THE EDGES,  
SHARPENED BY YOUR WORDS AND BY MY FEARS.

HERE IN THESE WALLS  
TEAR DOWN THE WALLS, LET THEM CRUMBLE;  
LET THEM FALL.

JUST TEAR DOWN THE WALLS.

LET ME FEEL AGAIN.

TEAR DOWN THE WALLS.

I DON'T NEED THEM NOW

JUST TEAR DOWN TEAR DOWN THE WALLS.  
You tore them down just enough...

Halloween was always your favorite holiday.  
A party at your favorite new age store  
a man carrying a case of harmonicas.  
Laughter filled those first months.  
Even your best friend approved.  
Turned your life upside down, yet again.  
Love barged into your existence...  
You thought... finally...  
The white picket fence....  
be able to watch as silver strands meld to white..  
wear each other's teeth.  
Even though he was a Catholic  
Your first question to him, when he asked you out,  
..would he object to dating a pagan?  
His response, "No, of course not.  
you were strong in your faith  
accepted a life with Mr. Harp-boy.  
This your fourth time tying the knot  
You had imagined a simple,  
yet elegant Hand-fasting.  
Harp boy's parents negated that wish  
They wanted the big to do, a proper wedding, with the trimmings.  
Well a Catholic wedding it couldn't be...  
Conversion... not on the table.

A compromise was finally achieved with a small ceremony  
And reception at an Italian restaurant.  
Your unions, a combination of hand-fasting  
and Catholic scripture.  
This would be the second time your bestie  
Stood by you for your vows.

Three days later, your happiness...  
Tarnished by a subpoena...your testimony is needed.  
Questions from years before...  
Your past laid out before you  
echoed in the Florida FBI office.  
Who did you know...what did you know  
What did you hear?  
Did you know this man? --Yes.  
He was your boss.  
And this one? Yes... he was a former teacher.  
What activities were you aware of?  
Questions about Mr. Arab ex. What did you know of him?  
What didn't you know of Mr. Arab ex?... Could fill a book.  
Did you know he had a record?  
Pictures were shown...Mr. Arab looked the same...  
His age betrayed by the white flecks,  
which only encouraged his looks.  
Authorities eager to give details...in digits...  
written on paper...  
You knew he wouldn't return the favor.  
A call...never received...  
yet served with court papers.  
Mr. Arab demanded twelve years of child support...  
After twelve years of punishment...more to be inflicted.  
Lawyer procured...again...  
Lies continued...as if time stood still.  
Lie number one - children always lived in the US.  
Lie number two - you had access to children.  
Lie number...What number was that... lie upon lie upon lie.  
Eight more years of lies...tormented...  
Tides turned...Fate stepped in...  
his loss...The court decreed - Mr. Arab owed you money.  
compounded by your daughter's choice to live with you  
She was abandoned...rejected...her mother's daughter.

WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!

YOU HAVE TO HEED THE WARNING  
 ARE YOU THE ONE WHO'S CRAZY

This time the warning, from Mr. Harp Boy's sister  
 He had a temper...he could be violent.

WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!

YOU HAD TO HEED THE WARNING

IT'S ALL A BIT HAZY

He tore her ear when they were teenagers, due to his anger.  
 But, he hadn't shown any signs of anger...until...  
 Harp boy's humor turned dark

PIECES BEGAN TO FIT

NOW YOU COULD SEE IT

THERE WERE ALL THOSE WARNINGS...

His anger brewed along with lack of self-control.  
 The first such instance came when his priest  
 had been arrested for child pornography.  
 Your question, innocuous, or your thought...  
 Why do these men of power wield it to harm children?  
 His reaction, completely out of character...  
 Well, the character you had grown to know and love.  
 More Hyde than Jekyll  
 From where did that rage come?  
 As he screeched for you to shut up  
 his clenched fist, retracted to reach  
 for the beer bottle on the coffee table.  
 You stood there, six months pregnant, stunned.  
 Your eyes followed his hand on the bottle...  
 "Don't you dare." Your voice ice cold, yet calm.  
 "You do it, and you will regret it  
 for the rest of your life."  
 As quickly as he had grabbed the bottle, he released it.  
 You turned and walked away...  
 So, this was how the universe was to test your strength  
 or resolve to face your shadows?  
 In the past, the need to combat and fight back with anger  
 would have escalated an already tense situation.  
 You hoped this was a one time,  
 And rare event.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the case.

Your final child...born two months too soon  
His life hung on a thread...tied to monitors  
Heartbeat pulsing in rhythm...repeated through stark halls  
Tiny toes pulled leads...curious, yet knowing eyes  
Watched...everyone... Wisdom shown through weeks old eyes.  
Your happiness lived through him.  
His innocence viewed the world with awe...  
This tiny little boy brought joy  
His lungs weren't strong enough  
He spent his first month in the NICU  
When in the NICU the doctors made it apparent  
that your beautiful boy couldn't be in a day care.  
Your maternity leave wouldn't last a year.  
Salary wise, the best option was for Harp-boy  
to be a stay home parent.  
In your mind it was the logical choice.  
You had to put aside,  
as hard as it was, the need to stay home.  
Financially, it had to be done.  
Your salary was three times that of harp-boy.  
With his degree in art, you rationalized,  
he could concentrate on drawing and painting,  
get his portfolio together.  
Compartmentalized your wants and your son's needs.  
Yet, every day you felt it a punishment  
to call and see how the little guy was during the day.  
Didn't you manipulate him by calling during your lunch hour.  
Kept him on a leash.

Music filled the evenings, when harp-boy  
Joined the band. His playing took the fusion of Irish and  
jazz to a touch of blues.  
Usually, St. Paddy's day proved a lucrative venture  
However, in the middle of a show, harp-boy became enraged  
for a perceived infraction - grabbed your arm  
"Don't you look at me like that." As he threw his harmonicas  
in the case and stomped out of the pub.  
What? Like what? You played the previous scene on stage  
and couldn't recall any infraction.

Many evening meals were taken with the in-laws,

harp-boys parents, asked several times  
 "When are you buying a house."  
 Being tied down to a house terrified you.  
 Just the thought caused such anxiety and panic attacks  
 Harp-boy took my agitation and anxiety as an affront  
 to his parents... Why?  
 Because the conversation he was having in his head  
 wasn't the conversation happening in real life.  
 His rage escalated as he drove home,  
 with our son in the back seat  
 "Someone like you will not disrespect my parents."  
 But, you didn't disrespect them. You begged him to listen.  
 Fury intensified beyond any kind of reason.  
 He swerved into oncoming traffic.  
 What are you doing?  
 NO, you will not hurt our son.  
 You were dumped at the house... he drove off.  
 Anger had once ruled you. It was in a rage you found that  
 Corel does break if it's thrown against the wall.  
 A Swiss Army knife could be thrown hard  
 enough to be stuck in the wall.

At your older son's eighteenth birthday party,  
 everyone you knew as good friends were invited  
 to welcome your son and to celebrate.  
 Your best friend, of course came with her son  
 in order to introduce the kids to each other  
 Out of the corner of your eye, you see a commotion  
 The mother-in-law in a heated conversion with your best  
 friend...that won't end well.  
 Harp-boy grabs your arm, "come with me" he demanded  
 As you pulled your arm away, he commanded again,  
 "Go upstairs"  
 Why?  
 "Just go."  
 Once upstairs in the bedroom, with his voice lowered to a  
 growl,- "You're having sex with your friend"  
 more a statement than a question.  
 You're dumbfounded. My friend? What friend?  
 "Her, the one downstairs"  
 At first you stood there, shook your head  
 at this specious statement  
 Then the absurdity of what you were accused of

instantly became humorous.  
 It started with a slight smile,  
 which cause his anger to rise.  
 As his anger rose, he began to pace  
 When your laughter erupted he picked up that closest  
 Object near him, thank god it was a pillow  
 Are you going to beat me with a pillow?  
 The word which erupted out, stopped your laughter cold  
 "You Bitch"  
 It felt like a slap in the face.  
 No physical contact - no tangible mark  
 Yet, the pain was unmistakable.  
 All the air felt like it was pushed out of the room.  
 As you punch the pillow he still held with your finger  
 You're dead to me.  
 You turn and walk back down to the party.  
 He was forgiven when he threw beer bottles  
 He was forgiven when he punched holes in the wall  
 When harp-boy passed out at your friend's wedding  
 After hitting on one of the other guests.  
 You always forgave - never forgot.  
 Appointments with therapists were made,  
 there had to be some way to deal with this,  
 before you revert back and turn the house into a war  
 zone

.

Harp-boy so wanted to make it in the music business  
 Mind you, he had the talent. Loads of talent.  
 Partnered with other musicians,  
 who treated his talent as a pro bono job.  
 You tried to encourage him to find folks who treated him with  
 respect and paid him for his talent and time.  
 That, again, was treated as manipulation.  
 One such musician, had a proclivity for playing inebriated  
 had harp-boy as a partner.  
 He also liked to drive drunk.  
 On the first such occasion at 2 a.m. a phone call  
 ..informed you that Justin was drunk;  
 ran into a guard rail.  
 The second and last incident, midnight rolled around  
 ..no problem.  
 1:30 a.m. his phone rings...call declined

Anyone with cell phone knows when a call is declined.  
1:45 harp-boy called, he would be home soon.  
3:30, still not home.  
3:45, he stumbles in. By that time, all patience is gone.  
He was absolutely shit faced.  
That was the last straw. You were done.  
You told him in no uncertain terms.  
Walls became punching bags  
as did everything in the entry way.  
What once was a copper vase became a mangle mess.  
He had lost all sense of himself.  
Pounded on anything and everything around him.  
Local police were called after he stormed out the door,  
where you then locked the front door.  
Harp-boy decided he wanted back in with fists pounded on the  
door.  
While waiting on the men in uniform,  
the mother-in-law called...  
she would do everything in her power to protect her son.  
You responded with the same.  
However, with the caveat, that if your son acted  
like an ass-hole you would call him out on it.  
Which you have, on a few occasions.

That beautiful boy, your son never wavered from who he was.  
Bullied, but not broken  
His identity questioned ....his Father....  
Turned to the old adage, "be a man."  
You countered, "he is a child. He is ten years old."  
"You will not tear our son down.  
You will not make our son feel inferior."  
His father, Mr. Harp-boy...left. Said "your son will be  
useless"  
Harp boy's family backed his accusations  
"You had an affair." Sure with your gay friend.  
Just because you didn't want to have sex with him,  
didn't mean you wanted sex with someone else.  
Papers were served, those you had expected.  
What you did not expect were the grounds entered...  
nothing benign, such as irreconcilable differences  
cruel and unusual punishment.  
They wanted your son.  
Harp-boy's sister had just lost her's in her divorce.

Guess it seemed only fair that you lost yours as well.

The games they played.

For months Harp-boy refused to see his son.

The excuse given was that Harp boy was given a directive by his lawyer.

Yet, Harp-boy must have had the sadistic pleasure in hanging with his friends across from your home.

Lunch with your son was tarnished by Harp-boy sitting across the room - you manage to get out without being seen.

Valentine's day spent in the courtroom -

A day forever tarnished.

She crosses to the piano and begins  
to play I will Rise.

Placed on separate sides outside the courtroom

You on the right, Harp boy on the left

While attorney's battle out divorce details

You write...No matter what was the outcome

You would rise...

#### I WILL RISE

CRAWLING THROUGH THE ASHES

OF BATTLE WEARY LINES

HOLDING ON TO PIECES

TORN FROM BITTER SIDES

WILL ALL THAT REMAIN

GATHER ON THE EDGES

WHEN I RISE

I WILL RISE

THROW OFF THE ANCHOR

IT WILL NEVER TIE ME DOWN

I WILL RISE

NIGHT HAS TURNED TO DAY  
THE SHADOWS HAVE GONE AWAY  
WHEN I RISE  
REBUILD ALL THE TIME  
I HAVE CLEARLY WASTED  
LEAVE IT ALL BEHIND  
TRAILS OF HARROWING FACES  
WHILE I RISE  
I WILL RISE  
THROW OFF THE ANCHOR  
IT WILL NEVER TIE ME DOWN  
I WILL RISE  
NIGHT HAS TURNED TO DAY  
THE SHADOWS HAVE GONE AWAY  
WHEN I RISE  
I WILL RISE  
I WILL RISE  
I WILL RISE

West Virginia granted you custody.  
But, Harp-boy was given twenty-four months  
to get his shit together,  
which meant - no child support for two years.  
The punishment for having a career  
making four times his salary.  
Mr. Violet eyes - open parents  
Harp-boy - closed parents.  
Two bookends to the story of your life.

Your power hardened...brick upon brick...

Time to put the walls back up.  
 Taking them down was the biggest fucking mistake.  
 Your voice ....loud, strong and resilient.  
 Rang free for your son...  
 Your voice could be heard...Your voice would be heard  
 Never silenced again..  
 When you give up your voice..when you silence yourself...  
 you give up your power.

She crosses to the piano and begins  
 to play When the Silence Sings

Don't walk into that cage..don't lock the door..  
 DO NOT hand over the key...  
 You are not that girl in the cage  
 Bust through the door...knock down the walls.  
 You are free...  
 Your scars are your story.  
 They remind you that you're bent not broken  
 You are powerful...when you let the silence sing.

#### WHEN THE SILENCE SINGS

WHEN YOUR HEART WAS SHATTERED

YOUR LIFE IN PIECES

BRUISED AND BATTERED

YOU FACE THE PAST,

WALK THROUGH THE PAIN.

YOU HEARD THEIR WORDS

SHUTTING YOU DOWN

CALLING YOU OUT

SLAPPING YOU 'ROUND

THE LOCK IS BROKEN

YOU KEPT THE KEY

RISE AND BE FREE

RAISE YOUR VOICE  
WHEN THE SHADOWS BEND  
AND BREAK YOU  
LET YOU WOUNDED VOICE ROAR  
RAISE YOUR VOICE  
WHEN THE PAIN BREAKS YOU  
LET YOUR SONG ROAR  
WHEN THE SILENCE SINGS  
WHEN THE SILENCE SINGS  
LET YOUR VOICE RING  
HEAR THE WORDS SURROUND YOU  
WHEN THE SILENCE SINGS.