

## Nadwa Naeem

### Gone

Here once,  
A man with calloused hands and a crooked back,  
Eight decades of stories, of fish, palm trees and sand--guttled and carved in to the shape of a man,  
Here once,  
A coral walled house, a roof to keep the sun on his knees,  
A window, as testament of time,  
Here once,  
A man with calloused hands and a crooked back,  
Brings the catch of the day to his six children,  
Here once,  
A man with calloused hands and a crooked back,  
Burns incense to stop seeing the ghost of his dead wife,

Here once,  
Six children with calloused hands and miles beneath their feet,  
A stubborn kind of exodus,

Alone now,  
The man with calloused hands and a crooked back,  
Eight decades of stories, of fish, palm trees and abandonment, gutted and carved in to the shape of a man,

Gone now,  
Man with calloused hands and a crooked back,  
Not even a gravestone to his name

## On Your Birthday,

I imagine, on the day you were born, the day the universe exhaled you out in one swift breath from the proverbial womb of the universe; time stood still. I imagine all the gods, that exists, would exist, those no longer living, those we've forgotten—descended on to earth to witness your becoming, a man that made time stand still.

& here you are after all these years, you, still the same. You string and weave words like second nature and everything stands still, each time. You, a man who neither conquered continent nor foe, make mountains fall to its knees. And to this day, I imagine when you move me to tears with your mastery of language, the universe stops and weeps with me.

And yet, of all your grandeur and joy, nothing compares to the warmth and comfort you bring by the simple act of just being.

So here's to hoping you continue to make time stand still, here's to hoping you level mountains. Here's to hoping you continue to move me. Here's to hoping you continue..being.

## Haram

Your tongue against my own,  
Your breath becomes my breath.  
This unholy union of bodies under forbidden sheets.  
With sinning hands and bent knees,  
I take what isn't mine,  
Your fingers first, an eyelash there, your clavicles next, the sharp edges of your hips, the inside of your thighs.

Haram,  
The word lies heavy on my tongue,

I say it ten times.  
Then a few more,  
Until it stops digging into my skin  
The ghosts of two dying syllables dancing at the bottom of my throat  
Haram.  
The letters burn the inside of my mouth

Haram. I spit. Before I take that which is forbidden.