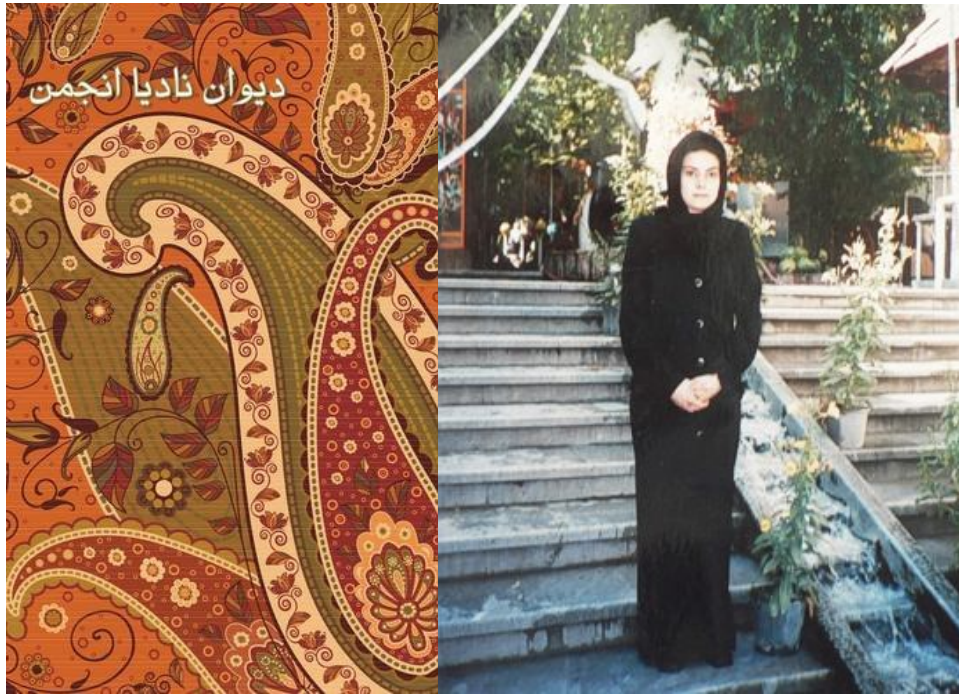


## Dark Flower—Nadia Anjuman Translated by Diana Arterian



As a teenager in Herat, Afghanistan, NADIA ANJUMAN attended the Golden Needle School in which a group of women gathered to meet and discuss literature with local professors under the guise of practicing needlepoint (a pastime approved by the Taliban government). In 2001, with Afghanistan's liberation from the Taliban, Anjuman began attending Herat University and soon published a book of poetry entitled *Gul-e-dodi* (Dark Flower). Her readership was not limited to Afghanistan – *Gul-e-dodi* found readers in Iran, Pakistan, and beyond. She continued to write poetry despite the objections of her husband and his family, and she was set to publish a second volume of poetry in 2006 entitled *Yek Sâbad Délhoreh* (An Abundance of Worry). In November 2005 Anjuman's husband beat her and Anjuman ultimately died from the altercation. In 2007, Anjuman's complete works were published in the original Persian-Dari by the Iranian Burnt Books Foundation <http://iranian-burnt-books-foundation.se/?project=anjoman>. *Gul-e-dodi* has been reprinted three times and sold over three thousand copies. The renditions from the original Persian-Dari were done in collaboration with Marina Omar.

—Diana Arterian, translator

**BEDROOM**

I saw a man sleeping in the gutter  
 who had given up all his godly possessions  
 He was covered, toe to waist, with an old rag –  
 the rest of him bare on wet ground  
 He had neither shoes on his feet nor cloth on his body –

fully naked and unaware of the crowd around him  
 Those people mocked the man, laughing at him  
 One person said he was crazy, another a drunk  
 One said he was an idiot, another faint, another dead, another lovelorn

All who passed derided the man  
 I stood above him, stupefied  
 Suddenly, he raised his head from the ground  
 Noting the people, he asked, *What is this crowd about?*

*Why are you so stunned? Has some giant fallen?*  
 They told him, *We're baffled by your condition*  
*O foolish man, you are on the edge of the road*  
*If you had any sense you would not sleep like this*  
*Perhaps some Laila<sup>1</sup> has wrecked your reason*  
 He said, *Don't worry about this lunatic –*  
*this reclining shabby man is an animal of the wilderness*  
*You ask about my clothes, but I am wearing silk*  
*invisible to sinful eyes*  
*The devout don't care if they are without cushions*  
*I am unafraid of the road's straw thorns*  
*If you had eyes in your head you would see my cushions*  
*This bedroom of mine is finer than any of woven velvet*  
 I sat down astonished, looking at the mud –

and I saw the awesome pattern of his prayer rug

*Hamal 1378 / Spring 1999*

**WOE IS ME<sup>2</sup>**

My body bursts into flame with his blazing love  
 My veins no longer run with blood, but burning fire  
 My tears that fall with his name light up the dark  
 My spangled eyes host this nightly crowd with light  
                   My sea-eyes pour tears, and yet

<sup>1</sup> Laila is a woman from a Persian fairytale. Her lover goes insane after she was forced to marry another man.

<sup>2</sup> The repetition in this poem is somewhat complicated, and was difficult to honor. Nearly all of the lines involve the repetition of the words “I” or “my.” Lines 7-10 repeat “land,” and 19-22 and 25-28 repeat “no” or other negative terms (“nothing,” “-less,” etc.).

desire scorches my  
 body – woe is me woe is me  
 My dull glance fell on his stare  
 My eye saw its tear fall in his lap  
 My heart fluttered away, falling in his hair  
 My pained heart fell there for solace  
     My aching heart withered with grief  
     My lonely heart beating blood, woe is me woe is me  
 My selfish flower is a farmer's new bride  
 My sweet lover is angry with me  
 My sighs heat this astral bazaar  
 My lips welcome groans now and then  
     My midnight call reaches the Pleiades  
     My clamor puzzles the owl – woe is me woe is me  
 I need light, yet my night is moonless  
 I am tired of wakefulness, yet my eyes cannot hold sleep  
 What remains of my heart nothing more than a bitter drop of blood  
 Woe to that trampled grass, no longer bright  
     My body is a small tree, just ripened and trembling  
     its fruit stung with cruel thorns – woe is me woe is me  
 The stonehearted lovers show no sweetness  
 Love is worth nothing to those drawn to gold  
 Alas, if my life is not drowning in joy  
 my days are nothing more than regrets  
     Fate will measure my stake in tomorrow  
     My world is ruled by shadow – woe is me woe is me

*Jawza 1378 / Spring 1999*

**ONE MUST TRY**

It was dusk, autumn  
 pitching its yellow tents on its allies – the garden and grass  
 The whipping wind's mischief troubled the tree  
 broken over itself, shaking all over  
 The garden was naked  
 and with a boundless quiet that breeds sorrow  
 A single tired bird had fixed its cold eye  
 on the rent nest she had woven  
 from twigs and straws the night before  
 and had nestled in with such pleasure

The rush of hail, like bullets,  
had pierced her weary body bloody  
The bird moaned  
With nightfall, the shadowy clouds  
shut out every slant of the moon's rays  
The lightless gelid garden  
wept with grief at the ruin  
The bird was afraid,  
trembling at the awful owl's cry  
Her throat was hard with grief  
With one wave of its finger,  
the wind had flung her snug home like a toy  
The little hungry bird  
shivered on a willow's limb  
Night passed into morning  
The bird opened her eyes  
and stared at the bare branch  
hanging under the rain – cold, dark, and wet  
with no leaf or flower  
Two tears fell from her eyes  
*How powerless I am!*

The bird shot up and flew  
toward the vast land of pain and woe –  
In the peak of loneliness,  
she tried to flee the empty garden  
Then it was spring – trees made one hundred ardent and coy gestures  
Pearly flower glow and dayspring's breeze  
sprinkled perfume on the garden's face

The swallows were the garden's guests  
The air was sweet, the butterflies whirling  
The bird resolved to go, gathered herself, and left  
She set off to a strange place and touched down  
under the azure dome, clear and shining  
all around her was green and thrilling  
She peered at the lively birds  
singing among trees  
Then she rejoiced in the newness  
She laughed to herself –

*Life continues*

*and has no concern for my sadness,  
why not care for myself and be content*

*I will try*

*I will shape a home of love and light*

*in the height of the pines*

*in a safe place where eagles cannot reach*

*in a shielded corner –*

*even the wind won't throw it ground-ward*

She flew to the land of hope and wove a nest  
and she settled like an empress in a silver palace  
and she sang

*Life continues*

*and has no concern for my sadness*

*One must try*

*Jaddi 1378 / Late winter 1999*

**GO**

I would give you up even if you were my soul, the world  
 O bright dawn, I'm done with you – go  
 Go so I can return to the night, my kin  
 Its warped texture and mine are interwoven – go  
 Go, for I am tired of the tumult of our braiding and pulling apart  
 I am dying from the struggle, go  
 Don't, don't say there is hope for another dawn  
 My hope is near death, go  
 I am from the land of grief – how can I relate to you  
 Don't listen to the story of my pain, go  
 Leave me to this solitude of this deserted prison of misery  
 O happy bird who has never seen a cage, go

*Sawr 1379 / Spring 2000*

**TURMOIL**

Once more I am alone in the beauty of night  
 Once more I am in love with its solitude  
 Once more all are asleep, and I am drunk with thoughts –  
 the night gives me many glasses to swill

O the beauty of seeing with the heart's eye<sup>3</sup>  
 Once more the moon dubs me her daughter –  
 she calls me sweetly to her lifehouse  
 A hundred times she coaxes me to come home

Once more temptations encircle my heart  
 to pluck my soul from this sad place  
 I fly freely facing white horizons  
 I lift the gem of my life from this cage

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<sup>3</sup> This is a specific idiom that implies insight.

If I leave this dark place, know  
my home will be in the crook of God's moon  
My soul will climb to the center of God's light  
My heart will be a refuge for signs of life

I am a wingless bird who hopes to fly  
Whose strong hand should I look to to help me?<sup>4</sup>  
If no one breaks this iron chain  
I will burn with temptation's thirst

You take me to the brink  
O charming poem, help me  
Without you there is turmoil in my heart  
You lured me, now save me

*Jaddi 1379 / Winter 2000*

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<sup>4</sup> To look at someone's hand in Farsi implies an expectation or hope that they will provide something for you.

*About the translator:*

**DIANA ARTERIAN** was born and raised in Arizona. She currently resides in Los Angeles where she is pursuing her PhD in Literature & Creative Writing at the University of Southern California. Diana is a Poetry Editor at Noemi Press, and a Managing Editor of *Ricochet*. Her own chapbook, *Death Centos*, was recently published by Ugly Duckling Press, and her translation has appeared or is forthcoming in *Apogee*, *Asymptote*, *Aufgabe*, *Circumference*, *Exchanges*, *International Poetry Review*, and *Two Lines*. More at <http://dianaarterian.com>.

**MARINA OMAR** was born in Afghanistan and has worked as an interpreter for Afghan refugee families. She is currently a doctoral candidate in Foreign Affairs at the University of Virginia.