

# Amina Saïd

## *Two Poems*

### *The Mothers*

[107]

From now on the mothers will sleep alone  
among the portraits of the dead  
only the mothers know where they've gone  
and how the long labour of dying  
had distanced them already from the living

alone from now on the mothers wander  
among the graves of the departed  
reciting down those avenues of death  
prayers in unknown languages  
telling the heavy beads of dispersed time

they no longer measure time  
by nights that fall across the earth  
nor by mornings rising on the world  
they ask everyone where the territories  
of death begin and where they end

the mothers discover solitude  
the world contained by a square of hardened earth  
they keep having the same dream that cracks darkness open  
converse with the emptiness of mirrors  
repeat the same prayer in which daylight is dying

from now on in the rumpled sheets of time  
the mothers celebrate solitary weddings  
in the deep silence of their houses  
clocks without hands  
mark the passage of the hours

from now on night will have eyes  
tracking the mothers' sleeplessness  
two angels inhabit them who one day

will ask for our accounts when our turn  
comes to approach the doors of heaven  
with the rosary's thread broken  
the mothers pour the water of their tears  
into the graves' crucible  
they pay attention to the flight of birds  
messages from the dead between their wings  
our second home is built  
in the avenue of death say the mothers  
why have we given life  
just to struggle with the shadow for it  
until our own last breath  
all we see of our kin is bleached bones  
hands soiled with graveyard earth  
we plant trees and bushes so those branches  
will be the roof of their new dwelling  
if only we had known say the mothers  
we reread letters the dead once sent  
and imagine different answers  
everything becomes clear once it is too late  
there is not enough thread of regret  
left to string the shards of our night  
our hands tremble the mothers keep saying  
from looking into too much darkness  
our eyes can barely see light  
the suns have deserted our gardens  
long rags of cloud hang from the trees  
we all dance suspended like puppets  
with time holding the strings  
our movements replicate  
ancient gestures and from now on no one  
will hear our expropriated speech



what wouldn't we have done for our loved ones  
 plucked the splinters from life's thorny bouquet  
 then one by one the roses wilted  
 from now on through a window frame  
 we will watch the sea marry the horizon

[109]

our life a glimmer that flickers on shadow  
 slowly we divest ourselves of our backbones  
 hunched over further each day  
 with the inconsequential weight of memory  
 and with waiting for our own end.

*you who are no longer in the world's present tense*  
 but in an excess of night with hidden doorways  
 I create you in your own image caress your waters  
 we watch ourselves draw apart  
 and the dream shadows a never-indifferent night  
 then reemerges in all its weight of aerial pain

I keep you multiple  
 in the crucible of fecund breath  
 in the pollen-gathering corollas of silence  
 at the heart of a word made of shattered dawns  
 brought back to life in a prodigal day's shivering  
 more simply I'm taking a rest from your dream  
 from the suns in your eyes  
 it's that way with certain dreams  
 as with great happiness or great sorrow  
 for your silence lacking a voice  
 for the dream that you bear in your night  
 the flame must be fed the lamp protected

*Translated from the French by Marilyn Hacker*