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Poetry by Zizi Shosha

Translated by Yafa al-Shayeb and Jennifer Jean

Editor's Note: This beautiful poem by Egyptian poet Zizi Shosha was chosen by Iraqi members of the [Her Story Is](#) [5] collective to be part of the *Her Story Is Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Arab Women*. Poet Kirun Kapur and I have been working steadily with native Arabic speakers to co-translate poems for this anthology, and this is the first poem I've co-translated with Yafa Shayeb, who is new to the HSI family.

Some interesting conundrums arose in our process: I didn't think the word *day* worked well when appearing twice so close together, so Yafa and I negotiated and found that the word *noons* also conveyed opposition to *night* while still indicating bright light. As well, I made the decision to create quatrains to form "regularized rooms" within which readers of English could more easily enter the poem, and I compressed several small bits further for brevity. (That included the difficult decision to change the first instance of the refrain "I know" into an additional "about," as in: "...chat with you about me—*about*/petrified air.")

The compression and movement of several words (onto different lines above or below where they originally appeared) was made in order to heighten the rhythm and content of each line. Regardless, Yafa and I have worked fabulously together, and I really enjoyed her explanations of Zizi's poem as one of deep pathos and self-reflection. — *Jennifer Jean*



Roads Not Changed by the Feet of Walkers

I have no past roads. And I can't put my feet up
on dark days
with endless freefalls.
I drink a cold night

and quench my noons with a handful of dirt.
Then I stand still
to chat with you about me—about
petrified air,

roads not changed by the feet of walkers,
sadness escaping the body of my purse,
these familiar clothes
that refuse to leave me

though they do not know me. I know
a man who was blinded
by staring at the world too much, and a woman
who is visited by death every night. Death

does not leave her without removing a lock
of her hair, and when she wakes—life
springs from her robe
like a hot loaf. I know

very well the silence that shuts a door,
and the hunger that creeps like a scent in the streets
in search of a slum.

I know a lot about empty skylines

and the land that has become
a hollowed belly.

But I do not know anything about my life-
blood which writes this poem.

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Art Information

- “Egyptian Tea Server” © Diane G. Martin; used by permission.



Zizi Shosha is an Egyptian poet and journalist who has been a featured speaker in numerous literary conferences. Her articles have been published in Egyptian, Arab, and international newspapers and periodicals. Her published poetry collections include *Strangers Hanging in My Shoes* (General Authority for Cultural Places, Egypt) and *Let the Night In* (Mediterranean Publications, Milan). Her latest poetry collection, *New Clothes for the Dead*, was honored by an award for classical poetry and literature and will be published soon.



Yafa al-Shayeb lives in Jordan where she is earning her Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy. She is a volunteer for the Women's Federation for World Peace and other local civil associations specializing in the fields of child protection and raising awareness about gender issues. Yafa is a portrait artist and a student of the violin. In the future she plans to use the arts as a therapy when working with children who have suffered traumas.

Follow Yafa al-Shayeb on Instagram [@artist.yafa](https://www.instagram.com/artist.yafa) [6].

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Published on Talking Writing (<https://www.talkingwriting.com>)



Jennifer Jean's poetry collections include *Object Lesson* (Lily Books, forthcoming 2021) and *The Fool* (Big Table, 2013). She's also the author of the teaching resource book *Object Lesson: A Guide to Writing Poetry* (Lily Books, forthcoming 2021). Her poetry, prose, and co-translations have appeared in *Poetry Magazine*, *Waxwing Journal*, *Rattle Magazine*, *Crab Creek Review*, and more. Jennifer is the translations editor at *Talking Writing*, a consulting editor at the *Kenyon Review*, an organizer for the Her Story Is collective, and the founder of Free2Write Poetry Workshops for Trauma Survivors.

For more information, visit [Jennifer Jean's website](#) [7] or follow her on Twitter and Instagram [@fishwifetales](#) [8].

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