

Notes on the Disappeared (04-10)

1.

A case of mistaken identity:
wrong place, wrong time,
wrong name, wrong face.
That grove of pomegranate trees
not an orchard after all but a reliquary.

2.

Extraordinary renditions
for ordinary men.
Your only protection
what you carried in your pockets
on the day you disappeared:
a white coin for the black day,
a blue bead for the evil eye.

3.

Traps built by the language of law
for all with foreign tongues.
Your name held against you
like a loaded gun.

4.

Men without countries: canaries in mines.
The walls of indefinite detention
bricked in around them for good luck.

5.

This is no time for compromise.
We are all presumed threats
until proved otherwise.

6.

He lost the day, the night, the week,
the month, and then the year;
At first days were notches on a wall
and then day was dark and dark was light
and nothing counted but fear.

7.

They knock on the door in the dead of the night.
When they don't knock at all you're more likely to die.

I should be too old to say so
but this war has made me afraid of the dark.

8.
The rope is burning, but a twist still remains.
My mouth taped shut tries to shape your name.

9.
I asked for a witness, a translator,
an hour to examine the evidence,
and a clean sheet of paper.
They gave me the paper.
But of course I had forgotten
to also ask for a pen.

10.
The second time was her first mistake;
torturers are not born but made.

11.
A declination scrawled on a fax
permits a man to be burned into powder and ash.

12.
Between the tiger and the precipice,
most acts leave no evidence.
Occasionally, though, a body turns up.

13.
A rose can bloom in the midst of mud, but
blood cannot be washed out with blood.

14.
A letter so secret,
once read its existence could never
be spoken of again.
The trick: recognizing the envelope.

15.
Measure the erasure
that meets our dissent.
We must not forget that
compliance is consent.

16.

Your silence
will not protect you
when the border moves.
There's no place like home.
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-Mariam Ghani

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