



# *damazine*

Spring 2010

*Damazine – Literary Journal of the Muslim World  
Published online at <http://www.damazine.com>  
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## Poet Dissected

Lama Alghalib Alsharif – Saudi Arabia

You! Stop reading my thoughts,  
Invading my personal space!  
Which encompasses this paper—  
And everything I write on.

I'm so transparent to you, am I not?  
Have you figured me out by now?  
My life is literally an open book,  
No secrets can my heart allow.

You have seen me sad, and  
You have read of my tears  
You have watched me grow,  
In front of you, through the years.

You know what makes me smile,  
And how I process my joy,  
Yet I know nothing of your person,  
Be you a man, woman, girl or boy.

You look upon my lines  
And see the words of the wise?  
I sit here while you read,  
And watch my curtains rise.

Exposed, exposed, exposed am !!  
An observation of the human mind am !!

Enjoy, enjoy dissecting me.  
Enjoy studying my anatomy,

“Be tough, be strong my girl,”  
Says my father as I grow.  
A shield of armor must encompass me  
Everywhere I go.

“The world is not safe, my girl,  
Not the way you believe it to be.  
So, protect and guard yourself,  
Do not expose your fallacies.”

Yes, father.  
I shall righteously obey—  
By sharing my every thought  
And what causes my dismay!

A fool, a fool, a fool am I!  
A disobeyer of my father's rule am I!

Enjoy, enjoy dissecting me.  
Enjoy studying my anatomy.

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*Lama Alghalib Alsharif is in her senior year at Dar Alhekma College in Saudi Arabia, where she is pursuing a master's degree in Information Systems. Among her many activities, she has co-founded a line of headscarves called "Gusto", and serves as a youth representative to United Nations interfaith programs and the Middle East World Economic Forum.*

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## Veil

Leila A. Fortier – Japan

Be  
That  
Veil that  
Restores and  
Covets my virtue—  
The fine woven thread  
Of my miraculous rebirth—  
Be that cloth that conceals  
And protects me—Both  
Maker and keeper  
Of my newfound humility—  
That my eyes now speak a thousand words  
Unheard within this silence ... the first of which is gratitude.

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*Leila A. Fortier is an American citizen currently residing in Okinawa, Japan, with her husband and 14-year-old son. Her work has most recently been accepted by The Sage of Consciousness Literary Review, and she is the author of Metanoia's Revelation through iUniverse. Her writing is heavily influenced by Muslim faith and culture.*

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## Leaving Gaza

Ronnie Glad - United States

Walking to Egypt in a blue sweater  
looking at his feet or perhaps  
nothing at all, in a tunnel bronzed  
by the camera's flash or by torches  
or by the American bombs landing  
above and the burning houses subsiding  
behind him to piles of cold rocks  
waiting under the sickle moon's  
dismal glimmer for something big to fall

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*Ronnie Glad is on his way home to Seattle, Washington, after spending the past four years in college on the East Coast.*

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## Cats

Laurel Lamperd – Australia

Slender long necked cats  
of Egypt  
caterwauling under  
the pink flowered acacia.  
They need shade too  
for love making.

The acacia is yellow  
in my country.

A white-limbed eucalyptus stands  
above the red and pink bougainvillea.

A part of me is in Egypt.

I came to see  
where my father died  
spilling his blood  
for my country.

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*Laurel Lamperd lives on the south-east coast of Western Australia. She writes poetry, short stories, and novels. Her latest novel, Crossroads at Isca, set in Roman Britain, is available on Amazon and via download from <http://www.smashwords.com>.*

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## Sunshine Caught Hold of Their Edges

Aasiya Mirza – United States

When I first started having the dream, the Indian didn't get shot. The dream ended just as the hunter saw the Indian, and reached for his gun. But as the dream went on, the hunter got closer and closer to shooting. One night, he pulled the trigger. The next night, he walked towards the body. Every night after that, the dream ended with the hunter, holding his knife over the Indian's head, staring at his scalp. Really, though, the dream ended when I woke up. The dream ended when I screamed.

I'll tell you why I didn't recognize her. She had a giant bandage on the back of her head. And she walked into school with no hair. Nobody recognized her because no one was looking at her face. She had plaster and gauze and tape sealing up the hole. I saw her reach up under her jaw to wipe away a sneaky leak of blood skating down her neck to her collar bone. She looked at her hands, reddened and wet, but she walked through the hallway without a stumble. As she turned into the girls bathroom, she kept staring at the blood on her fingers, and the last I saw, she was staring at it as she stepped to the sink.

By the next period the school knew. Akhira.

Akhira sat next to David in Calculus, but they didn't share notes. Every afternoon last year, they had met up in the public library to study together. David didn't recognize her.

"Hey Cari." David touched the girl's shoulder in the seat in front of him. "You're coming to dinner with us tonight, right?"

"Can't. Applications. Mom wants me to rewrite my essay. You should ask Akhira." Cari leaned over her desk, shutting her shoulders to David. He poked her again.

"Hey. Hey, have you seen her today?" Cari's shoulders hunched lower, but didn't turn. Sunlight hit David's eyes, and he turned to look out the window. The yellow light washed out the faces nearest the windows. Squinting, he could blur the lines of the students into the sunlight and lose their forms altogether. Sunshine caught hold of their edges, ate them up.

The bell rang, and David gathered his notes. The bald girl next to him was already leaving. When her pencil fell, he reached out his toes, pulled it closer to him, and leaned down to pick it up. Hands brushed hands—his and hers—and he looked up. Akhira.

The dream began like this: The Indian ran. He sprinted—jetted—flew. Just toes barely touching ground. His legs *leapt*. Grass caught his footsteps and catapulted them back into the air; catch; release. He reached above him and caught hold of a branch, swinging over a fallen giant, legs swept up, loosened then running again. Soft. Soft, and nearly silent but for the hard death of a leaf or the slash of the air behind him.

And he ran. And light parted for his entrance and shadow closed behind his exit.

Out of the shadow marched another, with footsteps made of thunder and leather. Deep into muddy grounds he sank, down into leaves and rot. Shoes caught on tree trunks and breath caught in airless rush. He jumped, but did not leap. And still he closed in. Still he followed, as every opening of the forest opened to him a glimpse of flying feet or twisting back or outspread arms, pitching for balance.

He ran and took his gunbelt with him. Here was the gun, there were the bullets, strung in a line along the leather. Here was the gunpowder, all in a horn, swinging like a pendulum, swinging with each step. There in the back holster, there was the knife—

Akhira adjusted her scarf in the bathroom at the mosque. I remember when they instituted the one-child policy at school. One person per bathroom—they did it so we wouldn't talk in the bathroom, get distracted, smoke a joint, share test questions. And it's nearly impossible to coordinate one person per bathroom. So they decided that at specific hours, only certain classrooms get a bathroom break. And a student from that class can only go to a specific bathroom. So you have to hold it. You can understand what a luxury it is to have a whole bathroom to yourself for a little while, so you'll see why Akhira spent so much time in there, adjusting her scarf, looking at herself in the mirror. You'll understand why it took so long for her to walk back into the women's side, into the prayer hall.

She sat next to Sofya, leaning against the back wall. This mosque paid money for its sisters section. It wasn't one of the radical mosques you hear about on the news, or one of those Arab mosques in the ghetto. This mosque had doctors from Pakistan, or maybe India. The Bangladeshis liked to be president of the *shura* council or clean the mosque, but the Pakistani doctors paid for it.

"Hey."

Sofya sighed. "Hey."

"So, Cari's mom let Mrs. Richardson have it today."

"Oh yeah?" Sofya played with the fringe on the edge of her scarf. She tied it in knots and braided the strands. One, two, three strands, knotted, braided.

"Well, you know how Cari's mom is." Akhira nudged Sofya, shoulder to shoulder. "Anyway, Cari had her Blackberry in class yesterday and she was editing a document on it. Her college essay, I think? But she had it under the table." Akhira glanced at Sofya, still winding the fringe, twisting it, curling it. "It was actually David who spoiled it. I don't know if Mrs. Richardson would have noticed. But he started talking to her really obviously and Mrs. Richardson heard him whispering, and when she looked back at us, she saw Cari's shoulders moving."

Sofya turned. Eyebrows raised. "She saw her *shoulders* moving? She saw them—*moving*?"

"Yeah well you know how teachers are—"

“Teachers and airport security.”

“Exactly.” Akhira smiled. “So Mrs. Richardson told Cari to pull her hands out from under the desk and show her what was in them. And Cari—you know—pulled her hands out and started crying. Anyway, her mom came in today and let Mrs. Richardson have it. So Cari gets detention, but she gets her phone back.” In the brothers section the muezzin began the call to prayer. Women stood up, finishing conversations. Readjusted scarves. Picked up toddlers.

Though Sofya stood up as well, Akhira readjusted her socks. She tightened the scarf around her neck and replaced the pin keeping it in place. Sofya motioned to her—*Quickly*—as the sister from Sudan pulled Sofya closer to her side, and the imam announced the rules on standing during prayer—“Shoulder to shoulder, feet to feet.”

Akhira stood up; she undid her scarf; she let it fall to her shoulders. Looked into Sofya’s eyes. She pulled it up and wrapped it around once more, tighter around the neck. Her pin gathered the material up around the crown of her head, and with the fold, the scarf almost looked as though it covered a bump of hair.

Wrapping her arm around Akhira’s waist, Sofya squeezed. She let go. As she knelt with her forehead against the carpet, palms flat, elbows up, Akhira gathered the carpet between her fingertips. She squeezed. She let go.

Sometimes I knew why the Indian was running, sometimes I didn’t.

The forest caught up with the meadow. It ran into it, almost by accident, and his fleet naked feet touched ground. Dead grass sank under him, yellow and brittle and cutting into the soles, the arches, the balls of his feet. He listened for the thundering crash of thick shoes, for the prod of a gun barrel at a tree branch barring the way. But shadows closed behind him, and whistles of startled stillness were lost in the songs of the redbird and the warbler. He stepped along the edge of the forest, confronting the meadow and waiting. He found a tree, large and broken, cavernous trunk opening to splayed roots. Fat tree, gutted tree. Barrel-chested tree.

He stepped around the empty gut and sank to his haunches behind it. He watched the meadow.

They made the announcement in the local newspaper. It wasn’t large because it didn’t have to be. Only one family of Muslims lived in Mesquakie, Michigan, and they didn’t practice anyway. And it wasn’t about the Muslims in their town going to school, wearing scarves. It was about making a statement in support of the war effort. We support our troops and their work to liberate the Muslim women, and all that jazz. Of course, Mary Gingold there in Mesquakie visits her sister and mother every Sunday dinner after the evening service at 7<sup>th</sup> Street Presbyterian over in New Madrid, and Mary suggested they bring it up at the next ladies Sunday school. And so Mary’s sister, Martha Cooke, talked about it in the teachers lounge at New Madrid Elementary, as a possible service project for the kids. So when

Caroline Day took home her Petition Against the Islamic Oppression of Women Everywhere, her mothers Bethany and Amber signed it immediately. In fact, the Days took the petition straight to their local chapter of LGBT Advocacy National in Dearborn, where they had their monthly meeting, and got the whole Activism Committee to sign. Barry Bruce, whose father had served in the United States Army during Korea, knew a thing or two about the government and took it to his state congressman.

Normally Representative Bill Short wouldn't look twice at something the ACLU would so obviously get involved in, but he'd already had quite a few calls and emails from supporters of that 2009 amendment to the Michigan Rules of Evidence for the State Supreme Court.<sup>1</sup> But the popular support, in his Dearborn district, still encouraged his dreams of riding a wave of anti-discrimination legislation all the way to the United States legislature. So he picked up the petition and signed it.

From there the process to a headscarf ban in schools was actually pretty quick. A few case studies of Dearborn mosques, where all the Arab women still didn't know English from Iroquois and where the bearded Shi'ite Imams argued against the evils of the West in their Friday sermons, and the state legislature was sold. These Muslims were getting up to something pretty bad in Dearborn. The Muslims in Dearborn protested, but everybody expected it. Chalk it up to the radical extremist tendencies of Arab immigrants and their angsty teenage kids.

When CNN came to my school to interview us about the ban, over half the Muslim girls said they wouldn't vote against it, if they were old enough. When the ban passed, I don't think anyone was surprised. Some people cheered, and some people got angry, but on the whole, I think everybody was prepared for it.

The day after the headscarf ban, Sofya stayed at home. The next day, she walked into the Islamic school in the Arab ghetto. Her father sat in the car outside while Sofya asked to matriculate. I can just see the principal's eyes widening. It's bad enough Sofya's Pakistani and a doctor's daughter, and it's even worse that she never wore a scarf before. It's not like it's hard to tell. It wasn't wrapped tightly, and she didn't have style like the Turkish women, or accessories like the Arabs, or a skull cap like the Malaysians.

Thirteen years ago, when the Arabs were less concentrated, some still attended the multi-nationality mosque and argued over moon sightings and window washings and prayer procedures. The principal had led Sofya's four-year-old Sunday school class in Qur'an memorization and taught her to read Qur'an in Arabic. So the principal led Sofya to the girls' 12<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. She walked straight into class and sat in the open seat in the front row. She opened her backpack. She took out a notebook. She "please opened" her Qur'an to Surah 2 verse 256.

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<sup>1</sup> The amendment proposed, by the way, that no veiled women could testify in court, and with the support of several religious and domestic violence groups, as well as the ubiquitous ACLU, it had not been passed. Imagine a woman who *was* being beaten by her Islamist husband, and she couldn't show up in court to testify against him unless she removed a piece of clothing she considers mandatory. Are you going to get her in court, and remove that little piece of cloth? That piece of cloth covering her mouth might as well be the entire 15 yards of a nun's habit—you can't get that thing off.

Akhira walked upstairs to Sofya's room. The aunties downstairs had pointed her up—*Wo uper hai*. I slid over on the bed to make room for her as she took off her scarf. Sofya watched.

"Are you used to it yet?" Sofya clutched the edge of the bed.

Akhira pulled off the cap that held her hair in. Her shoulders wrapped themselves in curls and shrugged up into the dark warmth. "No. Are you?"

"What did your parents say?"

"They want me to go to a good college." Downstairs, the uncles' voices mingled with plates and silverware clinking on the counters. They were starting to eat. I looked at the fingers intertwined in my lap. Finger over finger—line over line. I could hear Akhira's father raising his voice, Sofya's father speaking quickly.

"What did *your* dad say?" Akhira watched Sofya; I watched Akhira. The lines in her face—the mouth, the nose, the eyes, the eyebrows. The hair across the cheek snuck absentmindedly between the lips. The ear. Then movement. Her lines ran together in curves and accents. "I thought he didn't want you to put it on."

"What about you?" Sofya looked at me.

"Come on, Sofya. She's never worn a hijab." I looked out the window. I thought about the last dream, the one last night. The Indian had left the forest and walked into the meadow this time. He had stared at the sunlight. He didn't look behind him. But the hunter still came, and the hunter still shot. He died in the meadow, my Indian. And he lay on the ground with blood from his head quenching the brown winter grass. The hunter walked away with his scalp.

Sofya left. Akhira reached and took my hand. I squeezed. I let go.

It frightened me most when the hunter saw the Indian. He picked up his gun. He loaded it. The Indian was looking into the meadow.

He pulled the safety on his gun. He pulled the gun up to his shoulder, kept both eyes open on the target. The Indian twisted around the tree to catch sight of the sound. The back of his head waited.

When Akhira first pulled the scarf off her head, that first day after the ban, she wrapped it into a ball in her purse. Unlike the twin sophomores, she didn't leave it around her neck bunched up on the shoulders. And the three Arab freshmen had started wearing baseball caps and ponytails. But Akhira tied her scarf into a ball and threw it into her backpack. As she walked out of the building, after the last bell, she pulled it out and put it on. The last hair had settled obediently under her scarf by the time she took a right from the school parking lot into the street.

When she pulled the scarf off her head in the bathroom a few months after the ban, she pulled out her safety scissors and cut her hair close to the scalp. She pulled out her father's beard trimmer and shaved the edges until sharp, tiny bumps lined her skin. A helmet, a screen door, tinted windows—brown hair over beige scalp. She took her own razor, the one she used for her legs. She nicked a bit of scalp behind her ear and a line of blood slipped without notice underneath her jaw line and into the sink. Where porcelain curved into chrome, her hair carried drops of blood into the long esophagus that swallowed and did not belch up. Water drops from the leaking faucet slammed into the tiny red domes dotting the base of the sink, and they all washed down with the hair.

As she shaved, one hand cut away at the hair and the other swept along the skin. It felt for hold-outs, the shivering single hairs that had lain down to be passed over and rose again when all was clear. Akhira's hand sought roughness and discord; it picked along the ridges of her skull for recesses that might hide unwilling members. Then her right hand carried the razor to the left-hand's sign-post, and the offending hairs were cut, swallowed, washed down with a few drops of water and blood. Red blood cells and white mixed with dead cells and soap and met the sewage and the rats and the trash.

She ran her hand once again. She swept it and felt the wetness of the blood. Licking her finger, she turned on the faucet to watch the rest of her hair cling to the porcelain curves and then yield to the water plunging into the drain.

I saw a girl once; she had cancer. She wore a tight scarf around her beautiful head. She graced this world with her curves and colors and then she graced the next. And when Akhira watched the last hair slip into the drain, she stared for a while longer at the empty basin. I can't say if Akhira thought it through, what she did, but I tell you, people *noticed*.

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*Aasiya Mirza is a senior at Indiana University, majoring in English and Speechwriting. Next year, she will be entering a master's program in English Literature in the United Kingdom, and will continue writing. While her main focus is creative nonfiction and fiction, she also enjoys writing poetry.*

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## Dirge

David Radavich – United States

*In a time of war*

An ear to the ground  
measures dust.

The wind  
catches its breath

among trees.

Where does it stop  
when the face

falls into itself  
like a burst balloon?

Tatters  
of a colored

flag at the end  
of a lance, a dance

of no design.

Who can reckon  
the rhythm?

Who can utter  
the words?

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*David Radavich's latest books are America Bound: An Epic for Our Time (Plain View, 2007) and Canonicals: Love's Hours (Finishing Line, 2009). His plays have been produced off-off-Broadway and in Europe. He is working on a new collection called Middle-Eastern Mezza.*

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