

The Beauty of Sadness

A Short Play by Christopher Hibma



(SILENCE. IN THE DARK.)

GATHERER:

“I only want to see you and see nothing else. My lashes would flutter at the sweetness of seeing you. I have waited for you for so long. If only you would come back for my eyes to look at you. If only you would come back truly for my eyes to see you.”

(LIGHT AND SOUND BEGINS, THEN UNDERSCORES “THE GENTRY” BY SOMI KAKOMA FROM “HOLY ROOM: LIVE AT THE ALTE OPER WITH FRANKFURT RADIO BIG BAND”)

My name is Gatherer. And this is my revelation.

I was predestined by my ancestors. Those who came before me were gatherers, too. Some gathered corn, alfalfa, oats & soybeans. Others gathered souls to ensure they were heaven-bound. I gather none of those things. Rather, I gather others by making things happen. I fill in the cracks. I make things beautiful and meaningful. World-growing. Spaces for conversation. I am not a travel agent. I am not a party planner.

It was all so joyful and fulfilling. It was like taking that first bite of a succulent fish. It was like slipping into a cool pool on a sticky day.

Then... this pandemic. Fuck! Fucking virus.

“Salty tears have etched my cheek. Separation has broken my back. I have come to hate the world.”

There was a rip in the planet. A visible tear in our communal fabric. Our purpose. Our histories. Is there beauty in such sadness?

We gather to celebrate, to mourn. To mark transitions. We gather because we need one another. We gather to honor and bear witness.

I grew up in a family of missionaries and farmers. My father’s mother had a tabletop atlas always at the ready so that she could bear witness to the travels around the world of her progeny. She and I would sit at her dining room table which was covered with a cloth she knitted herself, I remember her wrinkled and knotty fingers pointing me to places I would someday travel to. Places where, many decades later, I would eventually meet my chosen family. Sitting by her side, smelling her rose perfume and the overcooked meat on the counter, I was thirsty to join the flight patterns her fingers traced and experience the world. Not as a proselytizer – as a gatherer.

(PAUSE.)

Chosen family. Close relationships formed outside of my nuclear family... My family is scattered across the globe. Along the windy shores of Alexandria and Essaouira, on dusty paths outside of Marrakech and Wadi Rum, in neighborhoods not yet seen in Ramallah and Damascus.

And... in Beirut. Arak-soaked tables of Kibbeh. Smoke-filled rooms. Cedars at altitude. Sand. On the salty skin of olive-colored men. A melange of languages, smiles and the oud.

Why does this family mean so much to me? Questions abound about those in my own backyard. Why traverse the globe in search of connection?

(MUSIC FADES. AS IF REMEMBERING A MEMORY.)

On a cool, classy night in Beirut, I sit in the presence of inquisitive minds and open hearts in conversation with a dear friend. Perhaps for the first time in my four and a half decades, someone names the nut. The root of the tree. The core of the fruit.

(IN THE PRESENT...)

I was shaped that night. Something awakened. A flutter of recognition. A juicy awareness of neuroaesthetics. Of geomancy. Of manipulating the flow and direction of energy. The science of the sand. This is what I know: purpose, aesthetics, rhythm, energy, spirit, time, place, nature, amenities, space... people.

Sweet names of people.

Ali.

Abdullah.

Hanane.

Chrystéle.

Jumana.

Wael.

Omar.

Adham.

Ahmed.

Amer.

Raeda.

Dahlia.

Hassan.

Hatem.

Laila.

Mohammed.
Sondos.
Raed.
Lina.
Sawsan.
Hala.
Rania.
Sulayman.

(MUSIC BEGINS AS UNDERSCORE. "DAWN" BY MEREDITH MONK FROM
"BOOK OF DAYS".)

Ziad.
Maya.
Hadi.
Eyad.
Lucien.
Dala.
Hisham.
Abdo.
Kamal.
Driss.
Jaouad.
Salem.
Maria.
Amer.
Amir.
Leila.
Ezzedine.
Kareem.
Mina.
Nehad.
Amahl.
Rabih.
Lamia.
Bashar.
Khoulood.
Karma.
Ayman.
Abdallah.
Chadi.
Rasha.

Basma.

(PAUSE.)

“The nostalgia, the desire, the melancholy, the adulation, the embrace, the fervor, the companionship, the familiarity, the infatuation. The suffering, the adoration, the intensity, the veneration, the ecstasy, the ardor. The burn, the dread, the irony, the insanity, the sting, the torment, the bitterness, the love.”

I've seen god.

I've known love.

I've met my blood.

(MUSIC CONTINUES.)

– END OF PLAY –

PRODUCTION NOTE:

Quoted text from “Night” by Ali Chahrour. Translated from Arabic.