

Some Day I Will Make Rings From
Them

I

What I'm going to say is a story.
It is neither a dream nor something
I have created.
It is an event, a real event.

There are some windows that people
cannot see through.

But I can see. The story starts here.

My life, what can I say?
How I lived my life from childhood?

In the past people did not have anything;
now they are walking on money.

Back then there was no money.
Anyone who owned a dinar was a king.

Nowadays if you gave a dinar to a child
they would not take it.

All our life we are imprisoned:
first in swaddling clothes, then nailed down
in our coffins.

That is the story of Kurdish women.

We gain freedom through imagination –
through dreams we build our lives.

Once we lived in harmony together:
Kurds, Christians, Muslims.

Whether rich or poor we shared each other's
happiness and sorrow.

Now things are different, living is not pleasant –
the rich look down on the poor.

In the past people were equal.

Back then people were poor –
we made the bride one dress, one vest.

There is plenty to say about those days, but I do

not like to talk about them, do not like to
remember those events any more.

The more you remember, the sadder life is.

Like I said, there is a window, a *dalaqa*:
it is morning and silence hangs over the village.

Farmers carry their axes and spades, walking silently;
flowers are waiting for sunshine, ducks and geese
are like lines of pearls, walking to the water.

The trees are whispering, the women are speechless
as if their lips have been sewn.

2.

When we were children we went to the mountains
to gather rhubarb and acanthus, dancing all the way
until we went back home.

Later we worked in the mountains under wind and rain
without bedding, sleeping in our poverty.

We used to grow crops on our land, we bought
only meat from the bazaar.

We grew everything: tomatoes, aubergines;
we kept oxen, goats and cows.

We had few men at home and people were poor
which means they needed to work.

Children worked too much for their young age;
we worked wearing ragged plastic shoes.

We grew wheat, barley, lentils, peas: all these had
to be grown and reaped by our own hands.

There was no money: there was poverty;
we all worked, raising goats and cows.

Before our grandmother married him, my grandpa
had another wife.

Their children were sleeping in one blanket, my
grandpa slept in his coat.

Our grandma was so smart, she saw how they could live –

a prosperous life with sheep and goats.

She collected wool and spun blankets; with her very own hands she planted and harvested.

My grand mother loved springtime; whenever spring came we kids would collect flowers to show her – primroses and daisies.

She would kiss those flowers and laugh with excitement, laughing the way women laugh for life.

3.

When the heat of summer came sweat poured like water in your eyes.

How we suffered until we harvested those crops! Men couldn't do this, it was only for children to do.

We harvested apples, we harvested wheat and peas, we picked cucumbers and tomatoes and when we returned home from work it was evening and dusk was falling

Our mother collected wild pears and hawthorn berries from the mountains, she collected nuts to sell.

One day, collecting gallnuts, our mother ran into a bear: they were both scared and stopped, staring at each other.

Then she told the bear:
Wait, you go your way and I will go mine.

The bear went away, went on its way; but after a few steps it turned, looking back at her, then disappeared.

She was also a cook.

She also worked with the men outdoors.

She went out to harvest wheat, to plough fields: she was more than a man.

4.

That woven bag: we took it with us to plant crops,

filling it with wheat to cast over the fields.

We would bring it to the mountains, filling it with firewood or edible plants – thistles or arum.

We brought it with us to work when we looked after the cattle, putting milk skins in it.

Our mother would fill the milk skin for us, putting it on our backs, carrying the water skin.

She would carry sticks under her arms for boiling milk.

We had to go far and come back carrying this.

When we got back, we were exhausted;
we were dead.

Every day we had to carry a bag in the very early morning to take yoghurt and milk to the village.

Even if we were little we had to do it, we had to help them.

And how far it was! And I was alone!
So this was life.

5.

So little by little, you know, spring would come, summer would come and we had to go to the lambs, go to the heights, go to the mountains.

We had to go with the men to cook for them.

We had to look after the livestock, we had to shepherd the lambs; we were yet to move to the city.

It was a hard life.

It was the maximum degree of misery.

I was a goat milker, I wore men's shoes and left my child in its cradle to milk the goats.

My husband was a tailor.

His tailoring work was for how much?

A dirham. We had a small sewing machine

and I would leave my baby in its cradle to milk those goats, boiling it so that my husband, myself, my children and guests could drink it.

6.

The Peshmerga, who called themselves opposition, had to be fed at the expense of the villagers.

The people who were poor, who had no food themselves, would have to feed them.

Whatever I say, I cannot tell how difficult it was.

They would come at night, taking bedding from us, taking food from us, and they became your guest, but you had nothing to offer them.

I swear I had to leave the kids at home to bring water, daily I had to make four or five trips.

And how far away was the water?

For water there was only one route and the route was far.

Spring would come, summer would come, then winter.

So this was life. I swear to God, this was our life.

7.

On that day no one heard the sound of the shepherd's flute; the only sound was an owl singing from the *Towk* tree.

It sang until a yellow leaf fell from the tree where children were busy playing.

I watched my aunt through the small *dalaqa* – the window of our life, the window of memory, of our sorrow.

I loved her with all my heart.

She was holding a severed ear with an earring dangling in blood; she wrapped the ear in white cloth, dug a

small hole under a cherry tree and buried it there.

Nearby the killer was pacing the corridor, still holding the warm gun of honour; he looked like a soldier who had just rescued a conquered land from enemies.

Back then I was a child, I did not know how sad it was to be killed by your loved ones, how sad it is when a spring leaf falls from a tree.

Every morning I wonder if her disfigured body was thrown into a hole or into weeds or devoured by birds.

Nothing could lessen my Aunt's sorrows: I could not make a happy story from Zare's death.

8.

I swear my family was a kind one because they did not beat me, even once.

My father was dead. I underwent an arranged marriage for my uncle's sake and he has never beaten me.

They came to ask for my hand: we were both very young.

One day our family said that we would have guests, but they did not tell me why.

When I stepped out of our house, I started crying, all the people started crying.

Without asking our opinion the engagement ceremony was done.

Yah, mine and my brother's.

There were two women and four men: the men of the family insisted I should greet them.

My family did not tell me they had come to ask for my hand.

Well my sister came and said:
You want the truth? These people have come to see you!

They made me stand up saying:
Come on let the brides kiss each other, in arranged marriages

they should exchange kisses.

I didn't know who my fiancé was: I swear I didn't see him,
I didn't know him. We, these four people, had not
seen each other.

I did not see the other bride, my sister-in-law.
I was dying of anxiety.

But my brother was handsome; he walked in a
manly way and wore a big *klash*.

I had a brother in law – he was very ugly, my husband
was not as ugly as him, yet he was a little ugly.
I said to myself: *No problem I will accept him the way
he is, provided my brother's wife is beautiful.*

Well it was the evening before Ramadan and I said:
For God's sake brother, is my sister-in-law pretty?
He said: *haven't you seen your husband, Ali?*
She is exactly like him!

Because it was fate it was done;
because it was done, it was fate.

9.

Ours was a love marriage.

Those days, even after engagement a boy could not see the girl.
But now it is different.

They see, they talk.

Not to be seen as a shameful I got married, my younger
sister too.

My mother was left alone, I was sad for her, but we
were poor. He was poor.

People did not have clothes: one wedding dress for four
or five girls.

If you had a white dress, everyone would ask for it,
fight for it.

I had a pair of high heels, straps that stretched and
fastened here, like summer sandals
that children wear.

On my wedding day I wore black.

I wore beautiful clothes, a white *kawa*, a beautiful pink dress in very light colours, high heels on my feet, a white georgette scarf around my shoulders.

In my culture, the groom would throw an apple engraved with the sign of the cross – an old tradition offered marriage to the one who caught it.

Now people are kings.

When I married I only got 25 dinars.

I had a bracelet, a necklace with a pendant: whereas now women want a bunch of gold.

Singing and dancing, *dol* and *zurna*, along the way; people danced the *dawat*, animals were slaughtered songs were sung.

Three days to celebrate amazing times: then the bride-time was over – my husband became a soldier.

10.

If I talk of my life as a Kurdish woman, believe me, it's all sorrow.

Before I could get married my father was imprisoned for one year.

When my father was released, my brother was arrested and became sick in jail, sick in his mind.

My brother's property was entirely confiscated. Everything.

What to tell you? I have nothing nice to tell you: it was all misery, it was a very difficult life.

The presidents were starting coup d'états against each other, then came the mass migrations.

We migrated once to Shaqlawa, next time to Hiran.

Our stories are all sad ones.

We slept on the roofs of our houses and airplanes bombed the village.

When we were small our mother constantly carried us to the caves from the village.

We suffered a lot, we suffered so much.

I was with my daughter-in-law when the Gulf War started. We escaped to Shaqlawa and stayed for six days. Then Saddam gave amnesty and we returned.

But Saddam captured people, pursued the Kurdish people and tortured them.

After that civil war started, we moved from one place to another, from here to everywhere.

My sons were soldiers, all my three sons.

II.

In Baherka there was civil war, at other places war with the PKK and Peshmerga forces.

So many houses were burned, so many people, including children, killed.

We could not sleep for the noise of airplanes and bombs; we endured so much hardship raising our children.

We used to work from morning until evening, weeding and harvesting wheat in return for a dinar.

Not even a dinar but a dirham; a dirham for a piece of bread or a kilo of wheat.

Even in Iran immigrants went to work: they did not go there to pass the time!

They suffered a lot. Their story is a long one.

My son stepped on anti-personnel mine that ripped both his legs off: imagine my life then!

The B'aath party called me in three times a month asking: *Where is your man, what has he done?*

At the age of seven I opened my eyes to this killing.

Life was like that not only for us, but for the entire Kurdish nation.

Our mountain towns were hideouts for the Peshmerga who rose up against the government.

We faced persecution for this: our father was arrested and held in jail for four months.

We daren't turn on the radio for fear that they would knock upon the door.

When my father was released he had aged so much; he had aged so bitterly.

Many men with my father were taken from jail and killed. So few of them were left.

There is a Kurdish saying:
If a man has power he can kick as well.

But I can say that women are capable of anything.

12.

The year they hung Layla Quasm they hanged three other boys who were students with us.

We were so scared because we were under pressure from the Ba'ath regime all the time.

Every day we were threatened.

As a Kurdish woman I was raised as a Nationalist.

This made us support our brothers and relatives in the struggle but due to this effort we ended up in jail.

The number of prisoners in that jail was over 120; there were over 20 people in our room, over 20 in one stinking room.

The place where we were held had been used for raising cattle; this caused us disease, especially skin conditions.

It was all war, killing, hanging.

We opened our eyes to a world of killing and slaughter and saw nothing else; I saw my people so deprived, so powerless.

We were young children when we went to see men being hanged; from the beginning of our lives we saw these scenes.

The party organization would send for me and I would say: *I'm not responsible for this, I am here only to teach, not to serve a political party.*

All night there were Peshmerga and by day there was the government.

13.

When we were at Bozan Bridge eighteen helicopters arrived. *Dear God, we said to ourselves, can we save the children?*

The helicopters dropped chemicals on the mountain, they dropped chemicals on our children and I said: *God, what can we do with them?*

I had gone to milk the goats and when I got back I had the milk bucket with me. When I saw my family, all down, I gave them milk; I gave everyone milk and they vomited it up like cheese.

The government gave us some materials to construct a shelter – wood and a window frame; at that time Diana had been burnt, plundered by soldiers and strangers.

Saddam's planes were attacking us, killing people.

People had nothing to eat: they emigrated, they ran away.

For many years my dad was a soldier, a Peshmerga who stayed in the mountains most of the time.

After my husband's martyrdom we stayed in Rawanduz, we did not move anywhere. When he was martyred the children were young, very young.

Our misery did not end there: my daughter died when a shell fragment went through her brain.

We had fled to Rawanduz, bare-footed, leaving the doors unlocked.

No one was spared.

There was nobody to take the wounded to the city to be treated: there was nothing.

When war came we would pack an animal and go to the mountains; we would shelter under a rock like sleeping shadows.

14.

Then the regime attacked Iran, the regime launched war against Iran.

Then planes Iran would come, dropping shells on us.

The planes dropped a shell here, behind our house:
The bombs made water spring from earth.
Water!

All the people of the world came to see this miracle.

On Fridays we would run away, saying that they targeted us on Fridays.

We would cross the river on a tractor, heading to the mountains.

We fled to the mountains feeling we would be safe there.

We did not regard our life as life at all.
It has all been torture.

King Hazy came, then King Faisal, finally Saddam came.
He was the worst.

It was because of him the people fled.

After the war, the prisoners returned.
My father asked about his family.

They told him: *No one is alive, go to Khanaqa's mosque and wash your face.*

Those times of war forced the Kurdish people to resist, to defend their rights.

The Baghdad regime did not spare us: it did not spare Kurdish families.

The beginning and the end of any political attempt requires struggle.

Those days of conflict were ones of imprisonment, Anfal, chemical weapons.

That struggle did not spare us: it did not spare Kurdish families.

Not in the beginning and not in the end.

15.

Rage caught me, my eyes were like blood.

I ran, for nine days and nine nights into government blockades, no way through.

In Qandil Mountain we suffered hunger – not another step could be taken.

A woman had a baby 15 days old at her breast; she left it on the bridge.

I left him, my baby.

I walked for ten minutes, twenty minutes, and then I turned back, found him still lying in the snow, his arms moving. I turned back for my child, my tears frozen.

Every year, every year, I swear to God, we fled to the caves – no grain to cook, no milk to boil on a fire.

We were very tired, but every year, whether spring, winter, summer or autumn we were on the mountain in tents, plastic covers, caves – there was no joy in the world at all.

The snow in my eyes turned black through cold and tiredness.

We were victims, victims of war.

In spring, snow melted, we were sitting in the sun; a fire was set, water warming, but I woke with my

heart in my mouth, roosters screaming.

Until the end of war fear was our closest relative:
If not today, then tomorrow they will come and arrest us.

That fear was our betrothal tryst, our wedding song,
our constant refrain.

So many feet crossing the hills, fear guiding them.

Sister, they said, why are you left behind?
I said, *I don't have the power to go on.*
I sat. They sat. We shared food and tea.
I looked at the bottom of the mountain
to the Martyrs' River.

Children on pack animals tucked into duffel bags, the
horses falling in the middle of the river.

I screamed as the water took my children, but one man
with us grabbed those children: like hurling cement
blocks, he threw those children from the water,
one by one.

The river did not win.

16.

Life stories: every woman, every Kurdish woman
has got a story in her life.

There is not a woman without a story in our
Kurdish nations.

But many of our stories have been lost, too.
I do not remember them.

Sometimes I sit down and I remember: there
is not a woman without a story.

I've forgotten so much, but at that time I knew
so much. I stayed with my teachers.
I was smart.

Two years I went to school, taking one child
by the hand, another left at home.

Housewives should have schooling but my mind
was with my children, one in the cradle.

What if they burnt themselves? What if they
burnt the house to ashes and flame?

Now I am old, my age has caught up to me:
my age has exceeded the age for education.

How should I remember reading and writing?

Back then, I was a child, I did not know how it was when
a spring leaf fell from a tree, that when any part of a
body is removed the whole body is disfigured.

In our days, kerosene and gas lamps lit our
weaving and knitting.

A tandoor clay oven waited every morning
for our dough making.

This was the way of life then.

Schools, shops, houses, markets – all had
refugees in them.

It became such that you were ashamed
to say that you were Iraqi

There are good and bad people everywhere: thanks
to God, in my life, I never had bad neighbors.

In our jail there were many heart-burned mothers
and sisters; with the coming of night they lamented
over the loss of loved ones.

They wrote poems with their own blood to relieve
their grief, to give courage.

Mothers of martyrs heartened us and sang:
*You are the future generation; the independence of
Kurdistan will come with you.*

Such hardship and grief I lived with, it equaled half
the pain that my husband underwent – and it was five
years he was in jail.

I swear to God in all those years of exile I did
not buy a veil, a skirt, a dress for myself.

Whatever I did was for my children – I was
their father and their mother, we lived

with such hardship.

Someone would build a house or cottage carrying soil on their backs; I swear, we women carried soil on our back in sacks and emptied it onto the roof.

Although it's a sin, a sin I know that God won't write down to me, I gave a bribe: five hundred dinar at that time: imagine what an amount that was! Five hundred dinar and the house was in my name.

At night, I slept with knife under my pillow, fear rushing like wind down a narrow corridor, my small son by my side.

Each day, each night, I was father and mother, mother and father.

17.

I watch her through the window, my mother, through the small *dalaqa*, the timeless window.

I loved her with all my heart.

Remember, she had a golden nose-ring she traded for earrings? Remember?

They were so beautiful, everyone said.
I thought: *I will give one to my daughter, one to my niece.*

They were each around one carat weight:
how much do you think they cost?
In life? In sorrow? In suffering?

I thought:
Some day I will make rings from them, some day in the future of my life.

Let that be.

18.

Now it is morning, again.

Silence hangs over the village where they still live in peacefulness, in the past, in the memories

of the living.

Farmers carry their axes and spades, walking silently.
Flowers are waiting for sunshine, ducks and geese
are like lines of pearls, walking to the water.

The trees are whispering, but the women are speaking
now – the women are speaking and their lips have
opened like violets in the sun.