

[WHAT IS A CITY?]

-- the question that constantly puts me in a state of panic

a pore

a cell

a womb, a grave --

(only worms are really deeply into home)

(along with the dead)

Could a case be made

for the dead?

Yes, it's called a coffin.

a place where people belong

as opposed to a place

where animals, nature, weather belong

belonging as quarantine, being 'pressed into a place

claim and sentence both --

Stay where you speak the language

a jar - encasement, pressing

the possibility of disease:

comforts other than creature-comforts,

luxuries

an interrogation - a place where you find your way

a where, there, or here

to be found

رشاد

Rashad (with a *shadda* on the “sh”
so “sh” doubles “sh-sh” then
a lift on the second vowel)
is an herb found only in Iraq
and spread of course throughout the diaspora –
Meaning, in private

First tasted in my mother’s garden
An uncle saved the seeds and she smuggled them
in an envelope to California

Sold to me also by grocers in Amman
who picked the taste up
on my accent

In my dream last night,
I found what felt like
a wall of it
and handed you a fistful to taste

Something’s been happening lately
The first secret of my own I’ve ever had
Not sure why I’m keeping it

I’m learning how holding
something in yourself
can be a trust pact --

*I am my own doctor,
I am my own oracle*

Want not for assurance
that you’re right in your own head

Anyway, I really hope you can try that herb in real life

[A HOUSE WITH A DATE PALM WILL NEVER STARVE]

for Laila Pio

nakhal nakhal nakhal
palms palms palms

fronds flood my eyes
wave them wet

i speak many languages
but only wear one name
form it with the callshape of your mouth

say it in the light of my garden
as you do in the dark
say my name in my palm-filled garden
same as you do in the foreign car-park

move west and nakhal twists into palm
tamr rolls out into date

and does not taste so sweet

حيز

*Iraqis live like rain
Cold fronts, hot spells*

*Travel like weather,
Spread all over –*

*Simultaneously with, akin,
and separate*

*The space the body occupies:
its domain: the sphere it bears --*

*No paper claim: Only the body's
displaced air*

[SITTING IN THE ACADEMY]

after Christina Sharpe

For many years I have practiced being in the
world, even with its grief.

On mornings during the Month of the Dreams
of Tears, I paused to look at flowers.

On walks I said to the magnolia: I could live
for you, even for your browning

blossom, sweetening when picked and left
on the bed for my mid-winter stubbornness.

The passionflower I admired for their freckles
and fringes; the guava blossom's gifts

I simply licked then swallowed.
Every season is the season of sugar, one might say, or

sugar-season's endless. Marzipan before
strawberries fruit, honey

without expiration. Sitting in the academy
with grief is a particular pain.

It wants to transform
grief into knowledge too soon. A lesson for whom?

NOOR AL-SAMARRAI

Noor Al-Samarrai is the author of *EL CERRITO* (Inside the Castle, 2018), winner of a 2019 Arab American Book Awards honorable mention and named “about the best piece of literature I have read in a long time” by late Lithuanian poet and filmmaker Jonas Mekas. As a writer and performer, she investigates the confluence of place and memory, the tender intersections of the personal and political. Born and raised in California to accidental-immigrants from Iraq, she completed her MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where she was a 2025-2026 Zell Fellow in Poetry. A 2022 Periplus Collective Fellow, Noor’s work has been supported by Allied Media Projects, Mophradat, and the Fulbright Foundation. Her poetry and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Volta*, *Diagram*, *Pin-Up Magazine*, *Jambes*, and other venues. She is currently working on an oral-history based poetry collection documenting the emotional cartography of mid-20th century Baghdad. Noor is proudly b/Blind and d/Deaf.