

Apple Orchid

Shahla Latifi

Presented by

My poetic Side 



Dedication

To those who inspired me

Acknowledgement

I am thankful to all my readers, who spend their valuable time reading my poetry.

About the author

Shahla Latifi was born and raised in Kabul, Afghanistan and now she lives and writes in Florida. Her first Farsi poetry selection (Parastootah) published in 2013 and her second Farsi poetry collection (Asal Wahshi) published in 2015. And now her books are available through the Library of Congress online catalog. Many of her poems deal with topics such as love, humanity, equality, and happiness.

summary

Apple Orchard

A Grand Poem

Wings Of A Book

The Chapel Of Love

Raw Pleasure

Love Is Kindness

Pleasurable Dream

Travelers of Life

Age

Broken Youth

Surreal Reality

Winter

Freedom

Good Intentions

Horizon

Memories

Light Of Wisdom

Troubled Storm

Farkhunda

Harmony

A Sonnet Of Love

When You Are A Mother

Entirety Of Love

Cobbles Of Hardship

Glory Of Lights

Short Poems-1

Short Poems-2

Short Poems-3

Short Poems-4

Short Poems-5

Demands Of Sanity

The Heart Of Humanity

Mozart

Peace

Transparent

A Refugee Child

Currents Of Unfairness

A Brisk Walk

Carefree

An Imaginary Man

Victims Of War

Short Stories

Three Topics

Restricted Traditional Afghan Society

Women's Rights in Afghanistan

Girls Education Problem In Afghanistan

My Hairdresser

Unfair Treatment Of Afghan Women

A New Hope (Short story)

Barren Heart

Dance Of Happiness

Night Breeze

Mahboob, Short Story

World Peace

The Starry Night

A New Beginning

Childhood Memories

Window of Dream

Destiny

Barricade

Midmorning

A new Dawn- Short Story

Blissful Silence

Short Poems- 6

Aching Heart

Darkness

Blue Sky

Beneath the starry Night

Secret Knowledge

My Lips

Troubled Midnights

Uncaring Touch

A virtuous Woman

My Imagination

Courage

Inner Light

My Compelling Heart

Filled with Passion

Silky Moon

Shrewdness

Red Lipstick

Strange Curiosity

Building my Self-Discipline

Gloominess

Empty of Love

I Wonder

My conclusion and thoughts on The Crime and Punishment- A book by Fyodor Dostoevsky

Emptiness

Self- Worth

TO Rise Again

Apple Orchard

*I miss you
Do you miss me
Do you feel ecstasy when you think of me
Free as a bird in the garden with sweet air
And the thoughts that are so mellow and tender
As the love of redemption with no greed*

*I miss you
Do you miss me
As spring that is waiting for the autumn to turn white
And the season could return to the arms of colorful delights*

*I miss you
Do you miss me
Like the honeyeater in the apple orchard
In a wish for the scent of the ripe pomegranate tree*

*I miss you with the feelings that connect
Love and feminine worries into the feelings of the heart
That are content with security*

*And by time
Again and again
Stable as the sun
As throbbing as the fish that swims in the stream
Free as the wind that dances around a cherry blossom tree
And as pure as the moon lit by the sun
That mystifies the strength of transaction*

*I miss you
And thinking of you
With the traces of my feelings
With the hidden roaring of intimacy*

Shahla Latifi

07-15-2016

A Grand Poem

"I love you like a grand poem."

Like a poem that reflects the beauty of night

In the arms of a sleeping lover

Through his content breath

Into the sweet scent of satisfaction

"I Love you like a grand poem."

A poem that reflects the beauty of a day

Under a silky sheet of roses

An admirer is seeking his love

And holds on to the feelings of satisfaction

With her aroma on his mind

"I love you like a grand poem."

A poem that reflects the art of pleasure

In the midst of two bodies

That brings the joy of contentment

And as a grand poem

With amusement of its meaning

That awakens our sleepy thoughts with the lush feelings of dawn

Shahla Latifi

08-30-2015

Wings Of A Book

*Books? the land of imagination is so clear and yet perplex
I could fly in the wings of a book
On the layers of dreamy clouds
I could sing from my heart
In the land of freedom with no disguise
I can meet a perfect hero
An elegant queen
In the fascinating layers of pleasure face to face
In the books, I could solve any puzzle
Heal any pain
And wipe out any tear
Also, I will find hope
Pleasures
Truthfulness
And nothing of despair
In the books, I will sunken deep with a love
That I adore For years to come and more*

Shahla Latifi

04-15- 2015

The Chapel Of Love

*The chapel of love was peaceful
All the angels were sleeping on the wings of happiness on a beautiful day of December*

*Inside of the chapel
A violinist was playing
The soft melodies
That carried me in the wings of pleasure in a garden so green
A garden
That was covered
With melodious sonnets and the
Contrast of light and sound
Of Beethoven's symphony No. 5
And Mozart 3. sweet delight
In a garden with soft passages of love
In a breezy night
With two lovers
When the wind dances around them
And the moon was smiling with no ominous clouds upon them*

*And in chapel of love
Guests were sitting calmly
With no laughter, no sound of any kind, anxiously waiting
To see the bride
The beautiful bride with skin like ripe olives from an olive grove that facing the
Mediterranean sea*

*Her hair soft
And was flowing
Under a vanilla orchid tree*

*And to see the groom
A man with a bright smile that was sitting on his face*

Very softly

Suddenly in the chapel

The silence was broken

By emotions and with the foot steps of a couple that was entering the alter one by one separately

With their heads high with pride

Their hearts excited with the sweetness of

Of a bond that is divine

And their hands

Were trembling while they held each others hands

Like the cold branches of vines

That shiver softly for the warmth of sun above

And finally when they stood face to face

In the chapel of love

People smiled

And the couple smiled

To celebrate a togetherness

To celebrate the beginning of incredible journey of life

As man and wife

Hand to hand

Shahla Latifi

01-10-2016

Raw Pleasure

*My thoughts are swaying in my heart
When I think of the warmth of one's skin on mine
I tremble with that thought
I smile with my lips tight
And I taste raw pleasure
As I see the full moon covers
The dimensions of a small bedroom
In a cabin in the sky*

*My thoughts are swaying in my heart
When I feel a pleasurable moment
That consumes me entirely as a woman
With the gentle touch of a firm hand, that feels mine*

*My thoughts are swaying in my heart
My heart is beating with excitement
When I see a hummingbird settles on a fresh summer peach
To nibble the juice of life as a treat*

*My thoughts are swaying in my heart
When I wonder the sweetness of his touch
The caresses of his arms
And the heat of his lips
When he whispers his devotion into my heart*

*My thoughts are swaying in my heart
With the view of unity
That brings the mellow sound of a woman*

With the sensual rhythm of live poetry in arms of a man

In the majestic moment of relief

Shahla Latifi

05-10-2016

Love Is Kindness

Love is kindness

Love is compassion

Love is the tenderness in our thoughts

During a tragic event

Love is a kiss

That is set on your cheek by your mother

Love is the aroma

That pours pleasure in the air

Love is a strong wind

That carries clouds of suspicion behind the Smokey mountains of neverland

Love is a word

That brings the broken pieces of harmony together

Love is a connection from your heart to mine with no boundaries

Love is happy occurrence

That brings people to laughter

Love is a bird that flies high as she can with no fear

Love is a surreal thought

That encourages hearts to care

Love is me

Love is you

Love is every one that could comprehend every aspect of war and hatred

With the grand feeling of forgiveness with care

Shahla Latifi

09-15-2015

Pleasurable Dream

*Dark and dewy in a drizzly cold evening
He loved to be cherished*

*In the shadow of his thoughts
He imagined a pleasurable dream
With restless whispers and moans
He is lying under a willow tree
In peace
As harmony of the sea*

*With a smile of delight
He reached out to her with adoration
Without hesitation
She stepped in the warmth of his affection*

*He tumbled like a leaf
The hidden moon glanced down sharply
Stars twinkled overhead in a half-cloudy sky
The breeze calming
And the bliss of love began to stream*

*She smiled softly
All of the touch
The laughter
The whispers
And the secrets in their glances
Faded away into the sunset
And the night despairingly left the love nest
For the morning to rise above
With the oasis of serenity amid troubles*

Shahla Latifi

01-01-2017

Travelers of Life

*We are the travelers of life
Each one of us takes a different path
To differ our selves as individuals
In the challenging circle of life*

*One is taking the straight path
That is safe? yet barren of happiness*

*The other takes a path so abstruse and knotty
Yet rewarding and tight*

*Some, take the same path as the the one next to him
Without defining his own taste buds*

*And a few
Stay in one path without rising the bars
Of effusion and gains*

*But despite all
We are all connected in one circle
With hopes
Wishes
True sentiments
Likes and dislikes as human
The most complex race of all*

Shahla Latifi

08-18-2015

Age

Age

The defying beauty of life

Stands tall

In any day

In any night

In every cold

In every warmth

Inside of the cocoon of life

To guide us

To carry us

And to make us settle

On the restless journey of life

Shahla Latifi

06-15-2016

Broken Youth

*The young girl with colorless cheeks
Her hands as rough as the winter cobbled sheets
Her hair as soiled as the roots of an old tree
Her stomach as empty as a small hungry baby
Her eyes were lingering on the ceiling of a small room
That contained nothing
But empty shelf, an old rug, and a few books
As she wished she was able to read them all
Piece to piece
As She was laying quietly
Like the flower's bed under her small window
She was thinking of her youth that was wasted
Her heart that was abandoned
Her imagination that has been faded
And of her parents that was parted
And she was thinking of all her pain inside
Since the day she was given away as a bride
To an old man
With tears in her eyes
And her right hand on her heart
She suddenly realized that her path has already been chosen
A path that's very narrow, yet straight
And she had to grant the wishes
Of her unborn child that was breathing inside of her
For better life
With determination and strength*

Shahla Latifi

08-04-2015

Surreal Reality

*Age doesn't define me
As I do not set goals
As I mainly go with the flow
Age doesn't define me*

*Age doesn't define me
With no fear
I can fly charmingly
To the peak of any dream
With my spirits high
As the moonlit shines on the voyage
Bold
But oblivious
I could fly on the wings of a royal falcon
Of any desire
Willingly
Age doesn't define me*

*Age doesn't define me
The melodious sound of affection
That runs through my beating heart
That's alive with hope
With a taste of surreal reality
With a fascination
Raw and adoring
That defines me
Age doesn't define me*

*Age doesn't define me
The real meaning of life
That flows in my blood*

That runs through the garden of wisdom

Defines me

A smile of satisfaction blossoming on my face

Defines me

Age doesn't define me

Shahla Latifi

07-01-2016

Winter

Winter has arrived

To make the bald eagles to fly up to their maximum power

And to dive in the unfrozen lakes

Or a river

With the heat of their strength

To catch a satisfying meal

Winter has arrived

To fill up all the barren wells

So tomorrow's gardens can grow fresh roses

Winter has arrived

For the wolf to explore deep in the snow

With his extraordinary sense of survival

Winter is not cruel

It's not demanding

And it's not here

To make us suffer

Winter is a blessing of nature

That awakens the love of life in heart of spring

Shahla Latifi

12-20-2015

Freedom

*Freedom is in our fingertips
When we free a bird from the cage
Freedom is in a smile
When we comfort an orphan child
Freedom allows our dreams to take flight
Freedom is in the air, and in the layers of a stream
Freedom is not a treasure
A possession, or a jewel
Freedom is a happy wind that blows our hair
Around a free apple orchid in spring
Shahla Latifi
11-25-2015*

Good Intentions

When I am down

Down with the tears of disappointments

Bring me a profound Silence

With an enthusiastic smile all around

When I am down in the darkness of shadow misery

Bring me candles for the window to see joy and ecstasy

When I am down

Very down

With the shivering feelings of loneliness in the middle of night

Bring me a comforter that has soaked in my mother's scent bounteously

When I am down

In the strong wind of a stormy day with my eyes shut

Bring me your strong hands to guide me through whatever lies ahead

When I am down with the secret thoughts of heartbreak

Bring me love on the palm of your good intentions

For this injured heart to mend

Shahla Latifi

11-30-2015

Horizon

*As the new year approaches
She is overwhelmed
And she is a little cold
With feelings of abandonment from all the injured souls
In the hands of darkness and despair
Around the world*

*As the new year approaches
She is nervous with conscious perception
Of a mysterious feeling inside
That all the wishes of children of planet earth
Will not be granted*

*As the new year approaches
The lady in green is worried
She is worried about the dark circumstances
That all sweet dreams suffer with*

*And she is worried
That she is going to fail again to reach her expectations
To end all the war
To introduce humankind to an unfolded mystery
Of how we can survive
How we can mend the broken boundaries
And how we all can triumph
Before the horizon succumbs to the dark side
For all eternity*

Shahla Latifi

12-28-2015

Memories

*Memories are like rain drops
That soothe our minds
By the touch of a loving pleasure*

*Memories are like an untold story
That lives in our hearts
With a desire and need to share*

*Good memories are like an uplifting memoir
That contains the bold lines of sweet love poems
That carries you on the imaginative wings of love and enthusiasm
Bold and fair*

*Bad memories
Are like a sad adventure
In which you have been told to bury
Under a brick wall of a harsh nature*

*And we all are the players of life
Spinning around all of our memories
Good and bad
Sweet and bitter
happy and the unwanted
To just comfort our hearts
In a balanced act of wisdom
With care*

*Shahla Latifi
09-02-2015*

Light Of Wisdom

*When I see the light of wisdom
Is not languishing in sorrow
When I see that every one has enough
To eat
When I see there is no soul
At the mercy of a vicious deed
When I see the lights of comfort
Shining through the night
When I see there is no child hopeless
With an injured mind
Then I would think
The glory of God still exists
In mankind*

Shahla Latifi

08-10-2014

Troubled Storm

*A flower needs care
With the hands of kindness of her mother
And the caring voice
Of her father
That reads to her the song of patience and wisdom
During starry nights
But when a storm arises
And the storm hits the little garden of peace
That flower dies
The care dies
And the voice of wisdom dies along within her
In a moment of chaos
During a troubled storm
From heart of angry sea
Shahla Latifi
11-10-2015*

Farkhunda

*Farkhunda had a soul with layers of pain
That covered her hopes and desires
As a woman that she couldn't be*

*Her eyes glistening with tears
Her heart shattered by despair
For she knew that her life as an ill woman was not easy*

*She wanted a rescuer
A guider
And a helping hand to give her hope
Comfort and a friendly smile
And to assure her that everything will get better*

*But instead, on that cold day of spring
Her dream and hopes were shattered
With stones of disbelief, betrayal and lies*

*Her body was taken out of her soul
With undeserved cruelty
And no respect for her life*

I wonder how she felt in those moments tortured to a painful death

*Did she still believe in God
Was she calling her mother from inside
Or did she know that the cruelty of human race
Is totally above all her good wishes combined*

*I also wonder with the tears in my heart
If she knew that compassion
Is a seldom gift that humanity bestows*

*I wonder if we can ever be able to rebuild
The broken compassion in our hearts
And let humanity shine like a burning star*

Shahla Latifi

06-03-2015

Harmony

*Harmony, it matters
Among all living souls
In the middle of a household
Where all the essence grows*

*Harmony, it matters
At the end of a relation
That spirals our thought with unjustified pain and anguish
On a happy, bright Sunday morning
When the love and happiness glow*

*Harmony, it matters
At the start of friendship
That excites us with delight
When the storm comes blowing
On an icy cold night*

*Harmony, it matters
And it's a gift that would shine
In the darkness with no hope
To bridge all of our wisdom
For inner strength to grow*

*Shahla Latifi
10-20-2016*

A Sonnet Of Love

*If I were to have a lover
I would desire him to be like warmth of sun on my skin
When the world is frozen under my feet*

*If I were to have a lover
In my time of need
I would step in a garden full of lively flowers observing
As they smile at me*

*If I were to have a lover
His gifts would contain glorious feelings
As soft as the feather of a dove for my treat*

*If I were to have a lover
He would relax my mind with the sweet words of endearment
As I traveled into a sonnet of love,lavishly*

*If I were to have a lover
A lover that could bring me joy
I would invite courage
To the doorsteps of my mind frequently*

*If I were to have a lover
A lover so genuine
A lover so compassionate
I would look up at the sky with a passionate and content mind
Ready to find my true destiny*

Shahla Latifi

01-10-2016

When You Are A Mother

*When you are a mother
Your world exists around your children
Your happiness is tied to their laughter
Giggles
Hopes and dreams*

*When you are a mother
Your tears of joy fall on the footsteps of their gladness
And the tears of worry follow the trace of their sadness
Disappointments
And heartbreaks*

*When you are a mother
You'll find your true self in your child's eyes
You will find comfort with their touch in your arms
And
You'll find treasure
In the sweetness of their voice*

*When you are a mother
You dignified as a person
And given a purpose of sharing your days and dreams
With their laughter and more*

*When you are a mother
You are secondary to your own
But your love expands from ordinary
To extraordinary
Until you become whole*

*Shahla Latifi
03-12-2015*

Entirety Of Love

I need you

I need your attention

The certainty of your love

To seek out a new life with my presence at night

I need your emotions to wrap me within itself

In the deepest layers of needs

Oh I need you

And my need has no greed

I assure you

I need your passion to justify me as a woman

As a dignified truce

I need you when the sense of darkness hovers over the depth of my soul

I need you for me

For my worrisome thoughts at night

Oh I need you

I need you to take me to the height of your power

I need you like the leaves that bloom on a tree under the sun

Like the stream surrounding a new life

With purity and the essence of love

I need your open arms

At the peak of my illusion

In the darkest moments of my day

I need you as the sun touches the moon for its transaction of light

When the birds awaken

In the sleepy meadow on the mountaintop

*I need you as fresh air blows the power of love around nature
I need you on my skin as clean blossoms with the touch of morning dew*

*I need you
As the time moves from spring to autumn
When wild geese are dancing in the icy lake next to a winter garden
With a touch of an entirety of love*

Shahla Latifi

12-01-2016

Cobbles Of Hardship

*There was a time
When I was attached to the strings of pain
Inside a cocoon of loneliness
I felt
Abandoned with no window to see outside
With the feeling
Of hopelessness in mind
And fear in my heart
I started to lose the essence of my well being inside
One foggy night
With a clear thought
And sickly body
I looked up at the small reflection of my soul in the cracked ceiling of the cocoon
That was lighting up with the ray of the moon
I saw my soul
So frail
Defeated
And unhappy
As an orphaned child*

*I felt that the weakness has conquered my motivation
And I sensed that my self-worth has broken
On the cobbled stones of hardship
Piece to piece*

*I also saw a fragment of a little girl
Whom once was
Driven
Passionate
And so alive
But imprisoned in the cell of a broken cocoon
With no fresh air to breath*

*No power to scream
And no strength to go on*

*I started to cry
And with a throbbing heart
I felt this disconnection of myself
From the pain that I've been feeling
For so long
Suddenly
I felt relieved
And my courage was awakened
And I felt the urge to recollect
My strength
And my wisdom
As a torch of guidance
To the passage to freedom
From the cocoon*

*Shahla Latifi
10-20-2015*

Glory Of Lights

*My heart flies with happiness
Like the thoughts of a free bird
That greets me at a foggy dawn*

*I smile with the happy bird
As she settles on the warmth of my palm*

*With a stroke of a fingertip on the layers of her soft feathers
She closes her eyes
And lay her small head on the cushion of my hand with trust*

*I kiss her softly
She stirs
And she opens her eyes with a loving demeanor to look at me*

*Suddenly
She starts humming a beautiful melody of sunshine
A melody that brings love to any cold feelings
In a foggy dawn with joy*

*A melody that makes the sun rise with a projection of peace
And for the dawn to engage with glory
Of prairie lights once again*

*Shahla Latifi
03-02-2016*

Short Poems-1

My heart

Can not be settled in your arms

When my body senses

An untrustworthy aroma

And my mind is hungry and intrigued

seeking the word of "love"

In an enchanted journey

Through the valley of pleasure or pain

with trust

If I was a hummingbird

With my small feathers

That are Wet from the rain

I would fly up to you

And by sitting on your shoulder

Shaking off all the rain water

On your heart

In your Memories

And in your mind

With the equation of love

In drops

I have found treasure in nature

The glory of life

And I have found the meaning of being alive

With the dewy flowers of the dawn

A ray

*Of good days
Is a hatchway
To see a brighter tomorrow
From a small opening
Of despair
So
With the keen eyes of enthusiasm
Find that light
To gain self awareness
And to create your happiness
With ambition
Not fear*

*Shahla Latifi
2015*

Short Poems-2

*There will be a day
When light will shine
Freedom will laugh
And Peace, will settle on every body's chest
Up high*

~~~~

*If I find the true essence of love  
In my finger tips  
Like a ray of sun  
That is peeking from the windowsill  
I will open all of my senses  
To a fascinating journey  
Around love and trust*

~~~~

*Anxiety
Tiredness
Depression
Worries
Despair
And the feeling of abandonment
Are the shadowy disguise of broken hopes*

~~~~

*Hold the moon in your thoughts  
Whenever you are alone  
In the darkness*

~~~~

*My lips were pursed as flower buds
My eyes closed in a moment of sinking
Into his eyes
My skin felt warm with his touch
When I saw myself laying next to him
On a garden bench*

*His hair on my face
My hands on his shoulders
His lips closed on mine
And the intense rhythms of my heart
So tender
Suddenly
I opened my eyes with a sparkle of virtue
And suppressed all his greed into his soul
That I am a "woman"
A woman of her own rights
A woman to be cherished and to be loved
Not only to be kissed and fantasized*

Shahla Latifi

2015

Short Poems-3

*I'll celebrate the new year with colors
With colors of hopes and dreams
Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
And with the colors of prosperity and peace
In the world
Shahla Latifi
12-29-2015*

~~~~~

*Cherish my heart  
So I can fly on the wings  
Of a dream  
Shahla Latifi  
12-15-2015*

~~~~~

*My youth
Was like the delicacy and strength of a ribbon
That was connecting my body
Mind and soul
Into an enchanted melody
Of dreams
Shahla Latifi
10-15-2015*

~~~~~

*I grew up in a village  
With fresh air around me  
Green grass under my feet  
The apple trees behind a silver street  
And they were all connecting my soul  
With a happy bumblebee  
That was dancing carefree*

*On the top of a young branch*

*In peace*

*Shahla Latifi*

*09-29-2015*

~~~~~

A woman

She is not just a face

She is a mind with a flare of wisdom accompanies her thoughts

A woman is not just a face

She is a reflection of light

That strives

For the search of the true meaning of happiness

With a great wish of equality

Shahla Latifi

11-18-2015

Short Poems-4

*Palm trees, the free umbrellas of nature
A wave of peace to remember
Layered with freedom
Miraculously, a sense of liberty binds the spirit of a palm tree and I together*

*I remember the night
The starry night
When a sudden gust of forbidden love
Danced around you and I*

*I remember the night
The starry night
When the vast horizon fell from the sky
I was sitting in front of a small garden listening to the breeze
The rhythmic sound of wind played melodically*

*I remember the night
The starry night
When you faced the sunset with your glistening eyes looking at me
Nightingales were singing
As the dusk turned into light*

*Tulips, the free-spirited beauties
Uneasy in the hands of stormy nights
Lay softly in the arms of a majestic land
In peace amongst the chaos
Peaceful with the joy that rises at sunset
Sways with the emotion of the breeze; divine*

Shahla Latifi
August 2016

Short Poems-5

*When he touched her face with affection
She trembled
When he smiled at her
She blushed
When he glanced into her eyes
The warmth of her heart awakened
And the purity of her existence bloomed
With the aroma of young love*

*Suddenly
She smiled at the garden with the feeling of fulfillment
With the urge to soar like a butterfly from one rose to another
To spread her wings on the green garden of life
Soaked with the energy of love*

*Shahla Latifi
08-15-2016*

*On the shore of intimacy
The sea breeze rises
The sky looks down upon the sunrise
The thunder of love roars
When two hearts come together
And two bodies are joined as one
By soaking up the waves of pleasure
On a heavenly night on the sea*

*Shahla Latifi
08-26-2016*

Demands Of Sanity

*I cry when I am broken
Unwanted and overwhelmed
But there is no shame in crying
I cry
Like an unhappy bird with an injured wing under a tree
I cry like the roaring thunder in the midst of a spring day
I cry like a child
When a disaster takes his mother away
I cry, and I cry
I cry softly
At times, I cry soundly with no demands of sanity
I cry in a moment of depression with an aura of gloominess
To release me
From the cold clutches of insanity
And to cultivate my unconfident mind
With a new smile
And the exhilarating energy
That revolves around me
Shahla Latifi
06-19-2016*

The Heart Of Humanity

*I believe the bliss of love can join
The enthusiastic dance of peace for eternity*

*I believe in the goodness
That still exists
like the ray of redemption in a guilty heart
That is remorseful, sad and sorry*

*I believe the returning strength
In the body of an abounded wall
That has betrayed
Beaten and broken
By the hands of war and greed*

*I believe children can smile
With no fear of hopelessness
Once again
They will cheerfully dance on the meadows
They will read aloud with their hearts as open as the sun
They will laugh at their wittiness
And they will form friendships with colorful Flowers
And they will find their way to the moon
Which will lighten their dreams
With her soft and loving light of perfection
And to grab the inspiration from the moon
To broaden their horizons beyond the sea*

*I believe the morality of life
With the unbalanced force of imperfection*

*So perplexed
Yet alive
Is going to find it's way
To the heart of humanity
Without boundary*

*Shahla Latifi
06-25-2016*

Mozart

*On a sunny day
In the bare prairie of my delusion
I'm thinking of your music*

*With the unbounded spirit of soothing melody in my ears
I'm thinking of you alive, Mozart*

*The rhythmic glory of the piano
In the layers of "Piano Sonata N° 11"
So divine
So immortal
With a blissful imagination of unity
Brings my heart close to you, Mozart*

*Shahla Latifi
02-01-2017*

Peace

Peace

*The most valuable commodity of life is missing
In the layers of a world filled with bitterness
Under the clouds of animosity
In the hearts of war damaged victims
In the eyes of humanity's greed and cruelty*

Peace

*The most valuable commodity of life is missing
From our hearts
In the dust of disbelief, that swirls around us
With nothing but despair and agony*

Peace

*The most valuable commodity of life is missing
The hands of prejudice and inequality drove it away*

*Let us find that precious commodity together
Till its, Spirit gives us courage
Till peace
The most valuable commodity of life
Returns triumphantly*

Shahla Latifi

06-25-2016

Transparent

*I am as transparent as a crystal vase
With stems of roses within its heart
That reflects the beauty of nature and the meaning of life
Brilliant yet perplexed*

*I am transparent like the moonlight
That shines through the darkness
And connects with my thoughts*

*I am transparent like a child's giggle
That buries an innocent lie into his heart*

*I am as transparent as a wish
That grants the gift of sacrifice*

*My transparency is always bright
Though my surroundings may change
It always sees the untold truth within my heart*

Shahla Latifi

08-10-2016

A Refugee Child

Most of the Afghan refugees who fled the war in Afghanistan lived in refugee camps near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The situation inside the refugee camps was dire, and thousands of refugee children were facing life-threatening conditions. This poem is dedicated to those children and any refugee children around the world.

I am a refugee child

I am a flower that has been cut from the stem

I am a refugee child

I am a child who is caught up in the middle of a frightful war

When the night is covering the vile world with its dark coat

When I am resting on the muddy ground next to an unlocked door

I feel myself again

I feel like a child that could smile in peace

That could go to an enchanted dream

In daylight when I hear the roar of the crowd

When I feel the sun's warmth on my skin

When I listen to hungry babies sad cry for help

When an injured man moans in pain

When I look around the valley of abandoned dreams

Full of anguish and astounding poverty

As we are all cramped in a cell of depression

With no hope and no fresh air to breath

My soul becomes cold

My heart gets lost in despair so deep

But when the nights falls softly upon us

I sense the essence of hope; that rushes joyfully in me

Suddenly I feel like a child

A child with a desire to be free

Shahla Latifi

09-01-2016

Photo- «Faces of Afghanistan», Peshawar, Pakistan- Afghan refugee by Steve McCurry

Currents Of Unfairness

*In the tender age of womanhood
I heard
I sensed
I felt the pain
The unforgivable currents of unfairness and injustice
That settled on the shore of my body and soul*

*In the tender age of womanhood
I cried
And keenly wished that tomorrow would be kinder to me*

*Behind the wall of broken dreams
A tree of energy grew each day
With that tree, I learned
I explored my mind
From the crack of dawn to the layers of moonless cloudy nights
To grow
To love
To laugh
To give
To hug
To fall
And to fly up like an eagle
As sincere as the light of dawn upon a green meadow*

Shahla Latifi

07-15-2016

A Brisk Walk

*A brisk walk on a fall day
That awakens the love of nature in your heart
Enlightens the new life with a sense of freedom in your mind
Is a heavenly gift to remember*

*A brisk walk at night
When the stars shine down on you
And the moon illuminates your path
Is a heavenly gift to remember*

*A brisk walk with your love
On any breezy day
On any bright afternoon
On any rainy evening
On any long, sad day that you leave your worries behind
Is a heavenly gift to remember*

*A brisk walk in the happy time
When excitement covers the unsettled feelings of the melancholy past
Is how to treat life*

Shahla Latifi

10-25-2016

Carefree

*Touch me with your senses
So I can fly on the wings of a dream
In rapturous ecstasy*

*Laugh with me from your heart
So I can run into the thickness of a dream
As a nightingale sings at night, carefree*

*Hold me in your thoughts
So I could sway in the arms of a dream
Like a willow tree in spring, lazily*

*Sing for me
So I can hear your whispers
As sweet sensation of love melody*

*Kiss me with your eyes open
So I can dance in the trembling hands of a passion
As the moonlight gleams mysteriously*

*Eat with me
So I can taste the aroma of a fresh apple
From your protruded lips romantically*

*Breathe with me
Through the delicate layers of unknown happiness
In the thickest clouds of sadness
With your love, patiently*

*Shahla Latifi
01-04-2017*

An Imaginary Man

*When you are in love
With an imaginary man
Who smiles at you without hesitance
Who looks at you in silence
And who gives you,
The pleasure with unspoken words of affection
You feel alive
And you feel liberated from the anguish of abandonment*

*When you are in love with an imaginary man
With a mind of gumption
That excites you
That grows your feelings
In the days and the nights
With the flow of sanctity into awakening desire
He could devour you
This is the beautiful sense of love*

*Shahla Latifi
12-15- 2016*

Victims Of War

*While little Alan was sleeping in his mother's arms at dawn
On a cramped boat on the Mediterranean Sea
His mother was still
She knew her path was going to be rough
Not smooth like the stream of light, pure and clear
But as a warrior in her heart
She was determined
To carry her beloved children to the safety*

*The ocean was alert and the waves were quivering
And each wave was dancing in a circular motion above the sea carelessly*

*Fishes
Big and small
From the depth of the water holding on the moving waves
To greet the visitors with the waves transmitting energy*

*Children were soundlessly asleep
Men were nervous
Women were preoccupied with motherly instinct and anxiety*

*Suddenly
The boat unsettled
Moved to one side
And the unexpected sound of fear covered the sea*

*Water panicked
Fishes jumped around the boat
And they spurt water with the sad news to each other*

*That there is going to be another
Grievous loss at the sea*

*Everything went silent
And still
With Only the wavering sound of the sea
That laid her trembling hand
On her aching heart
To pray for the victims of war
For the seekers of freedom who took bold chances
To grab the ray of a free land
In their fingertips of hopes
Willingly*

*Shahla Latifi
09-05-2015*

Short Stories

The attractive young woman in a form-fitting, simple black dress stood at her husband's bedside. She wanted to express all of her hatred. She wanted to pour out all her pain and her heart to him. Her soft, dark eyes were teary. She knew he was hopeless, and his body had no power for hostility and abuse. His authority to control her was diminishing. She thought to herself, This superior man finally is in his cage by his lack of compassion and empathy. This man, so demeaning to her that he ruled her entire youth as a dictator, now had no control of his emotions, fears, and self-consciousness. And for her, as a woman of virtue, ethics, and principle, she concealed her thoughts and feelings all these years.

But in this moment of clarity, she felt victorious. She could lay all the pressure and anger and bitterness on his cold chest once and for all.

From the day she arrived at his house as a young bride, she had drifted under her middle-aged husband's authority with no power of conviction of her mind and body. For all these years, as she grew into a beautiful and bright woman of twenty-nine, with all the wickedness and brutality of her husband, she remained clear-headed and sane. But now, she had a chance to take it all out.

She sat on the chair next to the bed. In the small hospital room that smelled of sickness and death, life was unbearable. The man lay peacefully on his bed. His white- gray hair was in disarray. His face was still stern and gloomy. The knot on his forehead that was the mark of his uncontrolled anger was still in place. By looking at his face, sad memories arose on the surface of her heart. She could feel beyond his closed eyes and sleepy thoughts that he harbored brutal desires for her to be still tormented.

She took off her wedding band, the only piece of jewelry she wore, and placed it on the food tray on the bedside table. Her raw feelings flowed freely, and she started to speak.

"I hope you can hear me, you selfish man! On the outside, the world perceived you to be honorable, and yet you have stolen my true identity, my self-worth, my youth, my self-preservation to be who I want to be. You beguiled my family with promises you never meant to keep. You used and deceived my body and soul for your advantages to make it utterly fruitful and joyful. But with all your desire to control me, you still couldn't accomplish your goal. You never steered my heart and my mind to bend to your wishes. Yes, you have used me for your pleasure. Even though you are officially my husband, unofficially you have treated me with such disrespect that I have no intent to forgive you."

Tears of strength overflowed deep within her aching heart. Her hands clasped together on her knees, and with a long sigh of despair, she continued.

"Even though this life was forced on me, I have learned to embrace any difficulty and danger, and not to hide from it anymore. I wish you could see your behavior and demeaning character from my perspective that you have not only harmed me, you have also betrayed yourself. As years went on, my spirit and soul deepened, and a transformation took place in my heart. Please do not presume that you could hear me, or understand me. Now I have the courage to go on without you. I know the time for me to seek out refuge in nature, reading and writing. I knew that when life sought me out, I should let it. So here I am to say my goodbyes."

The fog of a cold autumn day covered the hospital yard. The playful wind that danced with the trees knocked the window of the hospital room as if to say that it witnessed the rise of courage.

An unusual romantic relationship consumed her entirely. For a woman that should preserve her morality as a young widow, the thought of her to never remarry was unbearable. In Islamic culture, a widow falling in was sinful and dishonorable. She was very much against the concept and the fears surrounding that honor. To her, a woman of her well-educated mind she kept polished by reading books, she was keen to fall out from the circle of boundaries.

The idea of staying with her in-laws, serving them and looking after their wellbeing was a frustrating and unthinkable fact she must endure. As a barren woman who did not conceive a child during her five years of marriage, she went through much pain and disgrace.

Her husband, a military man who was officially respectable and unofficially a cruel man, married this beautiful, college-graduated young lady upon his father's request. As a well-trained military officer, he fought in war zones against guerrilla warfare? Mujahideen. But his achievement as a husband was overtaken by the power of dark societal rules. Those five years of marriage he manipulated his bright and open-minded wife by emotional blackmail, saying that if she brought a child, everything would get better for her.

The cruel game of manipulation to a woman who had no control of her body was despicable.

As time went on, the sexual desire she had for her husband faded; she started to believe that her happiness was in the hands of her wicked husband. She gave herself hope that one day she would have a child, and then she would fly on the wing of happiness far from all the unwanted misery and pain. She hoped for a sunny day with the smile of a child and a touch of assurance and love.

After her husband's death in one of the war zones in Southern Afghanistan, her days darkened. Her in-laws considered her a burden. They concealed their hatred, but the wickedness and coldness of their actions reflected their inner thoughts. Now, she must be stronger than before. She couldn't lose her clear head; she knew anyone with a sharp mind can achieve anything.

With this thought in mind, her style of positive thinking developed, and her frustration subsided.

She met her late husband's second cousin who lived and studied law overseas, who now worked in this abandoned city as a lawyer. His plight, Protecting the Rights of Orphans and Children Deprived of Parental Care, intrigued her.

She met him at a dinner party in his honor at his sister's house. He was a man of medium height with warm, inviting brown eyes, and he sat in her thoughts with adoration. He found a moment alone with her in the kitchen while she was helping his sister, a well-mannered woman in her early thirties.

"I heard that you have no children. How has this life treated you?"

She looked at him with a smile and answered: "I guess that was the first thing they told you about me. Yes, I am a childless woman and a burden on the shoulder of their broken honor and society. I think marriage and children do not make us happy until we have the capacity to love first, but who am I to judge?"

"I didn't mean to offend you," he said. "I admire your strength. As a matter of fact, I heard a lot about your loss, your fight against fear, and your power to rule your life with reason. And my mother and sister adore you."

Those words of wisdom and comfort sunk in her heart, encouraging her to love and hope again. She knew that he was interested in her welfare.

She looked at him as if she was looking into the mirror. Her inner beauty craved his touch; she wanted his strong hands to devour her body, to take her in his arms, to consume her with pleasure. She smiled shyly at him. Those thoughts threatened to awaken her very soul.

To her surprise, she saw the pair of glowing brown eyes stared directly into her heart with passion

and a purpose to love.

The sparks of a new era of goodness and kindness caught fire, radiating an energy for positive change in her life.

Shahla Latifi

December 2016

Three Topics

What is desire? What is the meaning of our need to feel the joy of intimacy? Why has nature provided us with perplexed energy to feel and want love? I was born and raised in natural surroundings and with well-educated parents, yet lived in a sheltered and restricted society. As a strong-minded teenager, I was always questioning myself about love and desire; I thought that any person should have a way to get his or her answers truthfully, and should be able to dress, feel, express, and love for pleasure. Since I couldn't accomplish such delicacy, I intensely fell in love with books, poetry, and my imaginations. I preferred loneliness because I saw myself differently than others. As I grew into a young lady, I still sought the answers for my forbidden questions about sexual intimacy and love. I knew there is more in a marriage than having children and mother-child bonding like the grown-ups were telling me. I wanted adults to admit their experience, wishes, and wisdom, not just feed me with a shameful cultural message. Now, as a woman who has failed to achieve her goals of love, I am more aware of revealing answers to all my questions. I know that women have sexual desires and fantasies that we should approach authentically with defined erotic intelligence. Then, and only then, we will be able to live a happy and fulfilled life.

Sexual predators primarily target young children, teenagers, young women and men choosing their victims based on their vulnerability and weakness. Unfortunately, today's electronic devices have a significant impact on how a predator chooses and controls their victims quickly and efficiently. Sadly, an overwhelming number of crimes against children are committed by people they know. Predators usually never consider the impact of their crimes or that the victim's lives would never be the same. They often do not obey the law, and they hide their actions carefully, but they can quickly unleash their destructive effects. Research has shown that some form of mental disorders has been found among most sexual predators; it is believed that predators usually suffer from low self-esteem, psychological problems, and abnormal sexual needs.

As a parent and advocate for children's rights, I strongly suggest that we all educate ourselves about our children's safety, education, and prevention regarding sexual predators. We must educate our children about the dangers of trusting and interacting with people, even those they know. To do this, we must put our shame and self-pride aside and instead put forth our best efforts to protect our nation's children. Together, we can teach them to be smart and make healthy decisions to protect themselves from harm.

Sadly, most people think of women as the weaker sex and do not understand that physical strength isn't the only measure of their potential. Women have been oppressed for the majority of human history, and this inequality still exists in different forms across the globe. Educated women with opportunity are capable of thriving in the professional realm. Women as role models can enlighten, inspire, and empower society. Instead of looking at women as the inferior sex, we should respect the feminine characteristics of compassion and empathy and have confidence in their abilities. It is necessary to recognize the importance of women as a whole.

Shahla Latifi

October 2016

Restricted Traditional Afghan Society

In lesser developed countries, men and women have to marry regardless if they want to or not. Every couple must have children purely for the sake of continuing their family's legacy and traditions. Innocent children are born every day to a place that is dying from within due to unjust treatment, and inequality without a touch of guilt or remorse from their leaders.

If we look carefully, we can see that, yet again, women are among those who are mistreated. Women are deprived of their right to proper education, tradition, and health care. Women are not given the choice of whether they want to have children or not. They are caught in the claws of a society unwilling to adapt to the modern world.

Women with an adequate education affect a community, with the lack of essentials, unwell and illiterate parents can not carry out their duties, and therefore society is getting worse.

So, an over populated society with various social and family problems is reproducing under the pressure is a big problem. Only by providing public awareness, teaching young girls and boys to develop better family ethics and skills through education is crucial to shaping a better and healthier future in a male dominated and restricted traditional Afghan society.

Shahla Latifi

07-10-2016

Women's Rights in Afghanistan

1- For me, the right and the integrity of a woman to be free is from sexual violence, and to be free is to have the right to own property, to have education, and to have control over your body.

2- I was born in an open minded family and raised to be a productive and a free-minded thinker as an individual. Unfortunately after I married, I became a victim of an abusive and controlling relationship that was achieved with criticism, verbal abuse, absolute financial control, and isolation.

3- The main obstacles that Afghan women face are the strict culture, low education of women, male dominance, and the denial of victimizing the women by men and society.

4- In Afghanistan, women's freedom used to be varied by class and level of education, but in last few decades, men seem to have dominated in many areas. Although in recent years, Afghan women have participated in various types of jobs and sports, but in general women have no public voice or freedom.

5- Conservative religion is not a good thing. Giving respect and obedience to a culture like this, especially in a place like Afghanistan, seems to be both good and bad for women.

In Afghanistan, the role of culture is very significant in their life, and sadly it diminishes women's ability to do better. And as I experienced, it's hard for women to be both amenable and stubborn and recalcitrant the same time, and unfortunately, I see the chances of Afghan women getting more liberty, freedom and respect growing slimmer, because Afghan beliefs, traditions, and Cultural values significantly affect their daily life, and it is very hard to break those boundaries without having tremendous courage and knowing your self-worth,.

6- After the removal of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the overall situation of women has improved particularly in some major city, such as Kabul, but in other parts of the country women still face many problems, unfair treatment, and abuse.

7- In Afghanistan there have always been restrictions concerning women in the country, and Afghanistan has always been a country dominated by men who have complete control over women. Under Taliban rule women were completely stripped of all their rights, work, opportunities for education, freedom of speech, and any rights all humans deserve.

Besides the harsh restrictions placed upon women, there has lately been an increase in violence against women, which is often excused due to domestic violence being justified by conservative religion and uptight culture.

8- I have not witnessed any improvement in regards to women's freedom yet, and to accomplish such goals; women must overcome negative patterns of fear and be ready to sacrifice for a better life.

9- All the years that I have suffered mental and physiological abuse, the desire to be free was laying dormant in my heart. By working on my self-confidence and self-esteem, I gained the courage to fight the unfairness.

10- My desire for freedom has affected me entirely, such as my economic security and well-being.

11- I do not possess a grudge against men. I believe our children need fathers, and men are a key source of happiness in healthy society. We just need to reconstruct the rules of Afghan society and educate people about the importance of women rights and equality in a society.

Shahla Latifi

04-25-2016

Girls Education Problem In Afghanistan

Women are the backbone of a society. Even though Women always have been treated secondary to men, but the fact remains that a healthy society needs educating and healthy women to build and reform a broken society to a well, a strong and stable place to live and to raise children with success and in prosperity for the future.

It doesn't mean that women can do themselves, but together with the strength and respect of men, they could have an important hand for rebuilding and restoring the essential qualities for a better life.

By having their own voice, making their own choice as free spirited individuals, they will accomplish and triumph as daughters, wives, and mothers.

And by higher and independent education and standing support, they will learn more about their values and rules in the society with self-worth to do better.

Every parent should consider teaching their children(girls) about their self-values and the value of book and basic duties in the future nursing and nurturing families, but also let them to read, learn, laugh and to have a little space of their own to breathe, think, imagine and to grow to whom they want to become with self-confident and self-preservation for who they really are.

With most sincere regards,

Shahla Latifi

My Hairdresser

I like my hairdresser/stylist Duane, a homosexual man who is emotionally, romantically, and sexually attracted to men. In the uptight Afghan society, most people look down on others like this negatively. As I became fascinated to learn more about homosexuality, I was intrigued to explore more on sexual diversity.

Duane is a man with good character. Duane respects me regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, education, and political views. We usually talk about current affairs and events and we approach every subject with an open mind.

As I always have been consumed by the reality beyond my experiences and cultural standards, I wanted to leap over the wall of prejudice to get a clear picture of homosexuality.

While I studied sexual attraction or sexual behavior, particularly homosexuality, I came across valid and exciting information stating that over time, cultural and social reactions and attitudes toward sexual orientation have varied by countries and places. Inevitably, in most parts of the world?and especially in more restricted societies with religious beliefs?there are barriers to learning about homosexuality. In such societies, homosexuality is considered a sin and an illegal act.

However, scientists have found evidence that homosexuality is determined by genetics, not a choice:

"A study of gay men in the US has found fresh evidence that male sexual orientation is influenced by genes. Scientists tested the DNA of 400 gay men and found that genes on at least two chromosomes affected whether a man was gay or straight."

? Bryan Fischer

Homosexuality is not a mental disorder or a contagious disease, and people have been openly homosexual for millennia. Some documents prove homosexuality appears to exist in Ancient Egypt, as is depicted in Zephyrus and Hyacinthus

Attic red-figure cup from Tarquinia, 480 BC (Boston Museum of Fine Arts).

As a woman who reveals the dark truth, I hope you will find this information helpful, without invalidating its meaning. I hope that my young Afghan readers will take the time to study on relevant facts with a healthy curiosity and research, to educate themselves, become enlightened, and gain knowledge.

The only way that we can change our negative perspective is if we learn and grow.

Shahla Latifi

11-10-2016

Unfair Treatment Of Afghan Women

Inequality, discrimination, and unfair treatment of Afghan women at home and their workplace are heartbreaking issues that bring tears to my eyes. Males of Afghan society are more likely the owners of any woman/female (sisters, daughters, wives, etc.) under their care. And such behavior is a sign of men's insecurity, guilt and doubts about their self-efficacy and power over women, and their fellow peers in such loose society.

As I have said on many occasions in my poetry as well in small articles, we are all the victims of war, natural disasters, and human destruction, and naturally as an uncivilized society, everyone experiences stress, inequality, suffering, hunger, and abuse.

But unfortunately, as history has shown us time and again, women have always been the primary victims of abuse in any community. Women who supposedly are the core of a society have been ignored, tortured, beaten, jailed, raped, stoned, and forced into a marriage without consent.

So do I think the estate of condition and treatment of women will change in a nation that has a broken system of justice for so long? Yes, but not in the near future.

This country that has endured harsh events over the years needs mending. It needs time to heal the deep wounds, to refresh the roots of its culture, and renew the history with better morals, intellectual improvements, human rights education, ethical upbringing and responsible manners so we could resume the efficiency and stability we once had. All people regardless of their gender deserve education on topics such as human rights, self values, respecting one another in a civilized fashion to, and most of all to teach every child /daughter or son about their self value and the value of women as the core of a society that produce, nurture and raise children for all of us. And finally accepting women as the better half of a healthy society that brings balanced happiness, fairness and equality in order.

Shahla Latifi

01-08-2016

A New Hope (Short story)

Even on a spring day, a city where ancient culture, tradition, and poverty manifested in the hearts of people smelled of dust and smoke.

On a sunny sidewalk corner, a young girl in a faded blue shawl seemed to know her way in life. She was short, less than five feet tall, with a beautiful round face and two green eyes that reflected the wisdom beyond her years. She perceived the people on the street very well. She knew how to tolerate their cold glances with the depth of her needs.

As the mild wind of a new day swirled among the busy streets, she cradled a small baby to her. The infant was a miniature replica of her with the same fair skin and soft brown hair. In a quiet voice she whispered into the child's ear: "As life can be bitterly cruel, your mother has to do her best to survive. Even though I never pity myself and never consider you the product of rape, life has forced this upon us. One day, my dearest, when you grow up, you will understand all sorts of problems and needs in life. And you will be able to see through me how much I cared for you. But I hope you will never remember these moments of desperation and beggary."

The child was quiet in her arms and seemed to be familiar with the busy streets of Kabul. He did not show any sign of unease. Suddenly, as if he didn't want to hear more about his mother's pain, he started to cry. He wanted her love and adoration. Greedily, he began sucking on his fist and grabbed the front of her dress. He wanted her milk.

"You are hungry!" the girl said. "Oh, I know, my dearest, I know you must be hungry. We have been here for hours." The long grey dress that enveloped her lent a beggar look that could not go unnoticed. Even though she had a small frame, she looked mature, well into her adulthood.

She couldn't stand her child's discomfort any longer. "My dearest, not here. I can't feed you here. Wait!"

The baby cried loudly, angrily, as he wanted milk and comfort. The young mother was agitated and sternly spoke to the child: "We will leave soon. Calm yourself. See, if we could make one more Afghani, so we could go home and rest for today."

But the baby could not understand the capacity and weight of pressure that rested on his fifteen-year-old mother. He could not understand anything but care and love. Just like some melodies reflect our memories, the child's cry for milk refreshed all the hidden wounds in the young mother's heart. And just as nobody is in control of their fears, feelings, hopes, or conscious mind, at this moment she was not in control. She started to cry softly, cuddling the baby to her heart. Suddenly she wished someone would be here for her, to listen, to care for her, to laugh at her stupidities with love, and to ease all her pain and problems. The tears and wishful thinking offered her some comfort and hope for the future.

With a smile, she realised that her baby had fallen asleep. She placed a kiss on his forehead and touched his soft cheek with hers. The way she treated the child with tender care showed off a natural bond between mother and child. But as she looked down at her child, fear rose within her.

She knew their lives depended on each other. She didn't want a load of bitterness and spite to diminish her spirit.

Now as a mother, with her heart and her dreams on her child, she had to be strong. With the vision of extra money, a feeling of redemption, and the image of a healthy and decent life imprinted in her mind; she murmured to her sleeping baby: "I have to take my cousin's offer for helping us. I have to put my stubbornness aside. I'll let her babysit you so I can go to school and try to find any available job. I must leave my abusive past behind."

Her rational thinking calmed her. She continued: "I have to be stronger and bury all my pain in a shallow cloud to look forward to better days. Our lives depend on it."

With the uplifting belief in her mind, she suddenly looked confident and refreshed. The sun peeked from behind the dark clouds, and she knew that it takes strength to find the purpose to live with a new hope.

Shahla Latifi

02-15-2017

Barren Heart

*He abandoned me
His hands
His desire to embrace my body as the sun rises above the hilltop
And his excitement abandoned me*

*Suddenly dark clouds of suspicion
Lingered on the moon
And the stars left me*

*The warm hand of devotion
That connected the thread of love had weakened
And happiness abandoned me*

*The aura of the night
His barren heart
The blossoms of my needs
And the shattered hope abandoned me*

*When dawn rose
The glow of life shone through the window next to the sea
With a soft smile
I whispered into his ear that you had abandoned me*

*The rain started to pour
The room stirred up with a high breeze
The light from within my heart glowed with hope
And the still of a gloomy night abandoned me*

*With a roar of strength
From the depth of my ruin
Alone
I climbed the moon with highest dreams
To capture my salvation once again*

Shahla Latifi

March 10, 2017

Dance Of Happiness

*The aroma of black tea
Awakened my senses*

*The rain is pouring
My smile is widening
And my eyes are glittering with affection
Looking at my black and white cat
Who stares at me*

*The wind, with force and anger
Emerged from the depths of the sky
To find love
To obtain acceptance
And to taste joy with flowing rain*

*Rain is happy
She leans on the firm shoulder of the wind*

*The wind let off steam
Rain laughs
With tears of excitement streaming down her face*

*Their bodies joining
And the echoing sound of pleasure can be heard from the distance*

*My cat, quite motionless
Rests on the soft cushion as a soundless spring breeze*

And I imagine

The swaying dance of happiness by the sea

Shahla Latifi

March 30, 2017

Night Breeze

*When the night breeze arises
To remove all traces of light
My heart sat deep in thought*

*When the moon covers the shallow end of my thoughts
A trembling hand of despair
Pulls me closer to the memory of lost love*

*On cloudy days when my worries are awake
I prefer to sleep in the arms of a quiet night
Calm and unafraid*

*In lonely moments of truth
With his memory lingering over my heart
My tremulous smile
My happy wishes
And the raw emotion that makes up the essence of my fruitful vine
Want to cry*

*Shahla Latifi
April 15th, 2017*

Mahboob, Short Story

The city seemed deserted. It was only nine o'clock at night, but as always, people had to stay in. War had changed everything in Kabul. The suffering and insecurity of the city were reflected in its people. Everyone was always vigilant, living in fear, and selfishly they cared only about themselves and their families.

On this cloudy and chilly night, the city was darker than ever. Mahboob walked swiftly in the small and muddy street without fear. Even though the city was considerably secured by American soldiers, a feeling of uncertainty gripped its inhabitants.

With all the problems and harsh realities that consumed Mahboob, he knew the destructive force of desperation had broken his real nature, and that made him miserable. And as much as he believed that his parents did not purposely fail him and his two brothers, now at age sixteen he was keen to survive by putting his needs aside. For months, he convinced himself that ordinary people must do astonishing things to survive. He had to do something to support his broken family.

As much as he was aware of the dangers of this life, he was confident in how to deal with risks and danger in this war-strike environment. He had to empower his will by taking chances and breaking any boundaries to escape such shallow hopelessness.

Four years ago, his father—a man of conviction and hard work—was injured in a bombing incident in northern Kabul.

The event not only deformed his father's face, but it also took his ability to think and remember anything clearly. And even though his father never demanded anything from his wife, a woman in her late thirties who had suffered severe migraines for years, now he was indefensible. His inability to function on his own turned him into a bitter, angry man.

By thinking about good days when his father was healthy, Mahboob gained more courage to move forward with his plan without regret. His mind drifted to his layers of good memories as a child, recalling the happy times when he helped his father at the small shop, spending hours with his dad, feeling grown up and cherished.

His father, a man of taste and literature, always carried a selection of poetry by Hafez. Through his passionate reading, he introduced his son to the height of art.

Mahboob's father was a good man, honest and kind. But as people's appearance can change during the years of enduring hardship and illness, their inside can transform, too. And now his father had

changed as well.

Mahboob made a promise to himself that he would get his brothers away from home, a place that was poisoned by misery and poverty. And as he experienced his pain and bitterness, he knew he had to grow stronger and become an active risk taker to make a change in his family's life.

And now, in the midst of a cloudy night that on which he was going to meet his thirty-five-year-old cousin, an opium drug dealer in Nimruz Province, Mahboob was terrified and uneasy. If his parents found out about this meeting, they would be outraged. But he'd rather take his chances and put a stop to this terrible ordeal of suffering once and for all.

Mahboob also knew that courage and goodness should be rewarded somehow. In the end, his parents would understand that their son's action was within the bounds of priority and goodness. With all that in mind, his uneasiness subsided, and he continued to walk swiftly in faith, trusting that he was doing the right thing.

Since he practically lost his father to the bombing in Kabul four years ago, those had been the worst years of his life.

With both parents suffering from ongoing pain, with no money and healthcare system available in a society that breathed and produced misery, and with no hope to look after their needs, the strong-willed yet sensitive young man was forced to jeopardise his safety by turning to such a degree.

Mahboob was confident that pain and poverty could drive some people to the edge of madness. He knew that sometimes, people tend to forget what's more important to them.

As he was diligent and honest, Mahboob had to sacrifice his soul to gain some hope and freedom. But he had no idea how to manage such an incredible transformation.

How could he make a plan or even think about such life changes? to leave school and to care for his ill parents and two small brothers? The idea made him shudder with horror.

He was going forth when suddenly thunder struck, and rain began to fall.

Mahbob started to run. He found a shelter. At the corner of the street was a general store with a dim light. Without hesitation, he pushed the door open. The store was ghostly, abandoned and mysteriously quiet.

He could not see anything, but he could hear someone's slow breathing. He said: "Is anyone here? I am sorry I just barged in like this. I saw the light on. I'll leave as soon as the storm passes through."

There was no any sound except the painful moaning of a woman. He froze, fearful. He couldn't imagine what was going on here. He decided to leave. But the rattling whisper got louder, and he

knew he had to help. He was drained emotionally, but his mind suddenly became sharp and alert. Carefully he got closer to the sound, and started again: "Who is there? Ma'am, where is your husband? Can you speak?" No more sound came.

He inched toward the noise. A small lamp on the table dimly lighted the store. The sound was coming beyond a curtain in the back corner.

Mahboob hurriedly took the oil lamp and pulled back the curtain, revealing a tiny storage room. The room was full of products and fabrics hanging on two sides, with a few yard tools in the corner. He saw the body of a woman lying next to a large bag of rice. A long dark green dress and black head cover veiled the woman, whose head was bent to her chest. She was motionless but still alive.

Mahboob put the lamp down and carefully touched the woman's shoulder. "I will help you. Do not be afraid! Are you injured? Did you fall? Where is your husband?" Mahboob was overwhelmed, but he thought, I will not give in to panic. I have to be gentle and careful. After a short pause, the woman slowly lifted her head toward Mahboob and he saw a kind face that showed her wounded soul. Sluggishly, she began to talk: "My neck and head are injured. My husband hit my head with his shoes several times, and then he tried to choke me. I believe he got scared and ran away." He gasped. "It's all right! Do not talk anymore. Let me pick you up from the floor."

"No, please, don't! Just leave the lamp with me, and you can go. I do not want my husband to see you here. He might return any minute. If he does see you here, it will make everything worse." Even though she looked scared, she had a kindness in her shaky voice. She looked at Mahboob with soft pleading eyes and continued: "You know this incident is against my husband's good character. He is a good man, but since he is using street drugs for coping with the stress, he gets out of control. And some days, not having enough customers boils his anger. Now, please leave and do not tell anyone about this. You know how society is? everyone is tempted to brag and gossip about someone else's problems. And if we lose our honor, we might lose everything we have achieved." Mahboob was far too unimpressionable to defend such a man that takes his stress out on a woman, but he knew it was hardly the time and place to argue. The woman seemed to care for her husband, despite what he had done to her. Very gently, Mahboob said to her: "Do not worry about nonsense. I will never tell anyone. I will stay here until the storm has calmed, then I'll take you home." The woman did not say anything and just kept looking at the floor. Her tears ran down her youthful face. Suddenly Mahboob knew this was terribly wrong. The whole picture, the ordeal of the circumstance? everything was completely wrong. In his mind, a woman should never be in this condition. A man should never hurt his wife. And a man should never seek refuge in drugs and violence. A fresh wave of hope? one without fear? decisively surged through his heart. And now he was in a rage that life can bring anyone to this level of uncertainty and risk.

He knew that his path has been decided for him. He was sure that he would never stoop so low to deal with drugs. And he would never feel proud and triumphant for hurting others for money. Mahboob knew that he could not close his eyes to such a reality. He tried to conceal his inner thoughts from the injured woman, who was clearly a victim of her husband's violence. He grew embarrassed when he realized the woman had drifted off into sleep. Mahboob looked down on her with kindness and felt an extraordinary relief that this day was finally over.

Shahla Latifi

May 19th, 2017

Painting: Im?n Maleki (born 1976), an Iranian Realist painter

World Peace

*Let me breathe the air of dawn
In the arms of a love angel*

*Let me refresh my feelings
With the touch of the dew of paradise*

*Let me laugh with no fear
To wake up in the morning
With the reflection of sunlight on my heart*

*Let me think with my heart full of joy
With my eyes bright as the moon
As thrilled as a winter eagle
That longs for her nest and young*

*Let me love you openly
With my wings as free as a sparrow*

*Let me smile from the heart
When the moon looks down upon me
When every silver lining of good memories
Dances around me*

*Let me run in the midst of a stormy day
That has touched the greenery
Next to an open sea*

*Let me dive into a dream
To fulfill my hidden wishes
By the touch of light from dusk until dawn*

Let me sleep in the heat of happiness

*Until world peace rises up
To create a perfect dream
That is covered with the true smile of bliss*

*Shahla Latifi
June 22, 2017*

The Starry Night

*He breathed heavily
In the hollow of her neck*

*He let out all the unwanted feelings of his past
To the softness of her depth
To consume an assuring certainty*

*The soft touch on her face
The lingering dance of his lips on her lips
Awakened the emotions of his needs*

*She surrounded her beauty
He captured her with dignity
The starry night was passing
The moon was reaching,
The height of the mountain behind them
The dawn settled onto the garden*

*From the depth of her soul
She breathed in his resting arms
Surrendered
To the green sense of love
In the cottage of tomorrow*

*Shahla Latifi
July 16th, 2017*

A New Beginning

*As I am looking
Into my dreamy depth with love,
I see the dim light of hope*

*In the darkest of my being
With my eyes wide open
And with a sense of a new beginning,
I feel free*

*Suddenly
The excitement of my soul
Expedites the rush of new life into me*

*My heart widens
With acceptance of happiness
And the breaths of fresh days
Swirl softly around me*

*Shahla Latifi
08-10-2017*

Childhood Memories

*I love the rain
The drops of affection
That close my eyes in the warm, loving light of dawn*

*I love the rain
When it gives me a little shiver
As desire flicks my bare skin*

*When the rain pours into my heart
It brightens my gloomy thoughts
The rain is generous with love
Shining through the darkness of drought*

*I love the rain
Like the purity of a kiss that brings me to my knees
The rain takes me higher to infinity
And brings back my childhood memories*

*When the rain follows the scent of rose on the wind
When the ray of a rainbow settles onto the mountain peak
It evokes giggles from happy days*

*The rain reminds me
Of my mother's inspiring smile
Her pearly white teeth like a ray of sunshine*

*I love the rain
When the night dew is on my lips
When the moonlight quivers with emotion
I breathe and whisper softly
Words of love into the rain*

Shahla Latifi

August 25th, 2017

Window of Dream

*By passing the open window of a dream
Vividly alive
I open my heart to the warmth of the sun*

*The flowers of love blooming
The happy birds chirping
The ray of sunrise kisses my face
The melodic sound of happiness crosses my mind
With the soft sheer of pleasure on my skin
And I see a day is rising above my head
Clean
Crisp
As a beautiful day to remember*

*By passing the open window of pleasure
Ecstatically inspired with love
I open my feelings to the heat of delight
Beneath the starry sky*

*When the rain is pouring,
The grass is fresh and clean
The garden is shining under my feet
And I see the night lingers in the garden
To enlighten my wishes for a beautiful night to remember*

*By passing the open window of a granted wish
Enchantingly desirable
I open my heart to the ongoing certainty of happiness
With the mountains and the valleys full of life
The eagle's nest bright and cheery
The deer are all happy and free
And I am resting in a wood cabin in front of a fire
With the peace and certainty of a love to remember*

Shahla Latifi

09-17-2017

Destiny

*Destiny is a noun that has been used by my mother
To ensure the depths of life's uncertainties*

*Destiny is an utterly indulgent word
To escape from reality*

*If a bird breaks her wing
On the shoulder of a windowsill*

If the sun wants to sleep all day soundlessly

*If a garden is drying
And no one could hear the melody of her awakening soul
When I dance carefree with the temptation of love coming upon me*

*My mother
Would connect every Unenthusiastic yet satisfactory moment
To that unclear fact of life
The destiny*

*Shahla Latifi
October 7th, 2017*

Barricade

*Every night
When the sheer darkness covered the world
A woman
Gave into her uncaring husband's demands, unwillingly*

*Thereafter, her self-respect
Suffered a deep decline*

*Gloomy and unsatisfied
She let out a sigh of relief
And as lonely as a solitary bird in an abandoned city
She returned to the mystic world of self-efficacy*

*In the mornings
With no hope to shine through the barricade of her will
She faced life with a smile
Devouring the sense of freedom for herself
And for her unborn child, diligently*

*Shahla Latifi
11-09-2017*

Midmorning

*My pets are at their places
Without notice, busy grooming
The sun shines
The lake covered with a lazy fog
Small birds from their lovely nests,
Peeking, singing, embracing one another in couples
The heat casting pressure into the air
Under the reach of my happy wishes
The mid-morning is growing*

*Through all the wonders of a hushed day
With a passionate feeling, I feel privileged
Unwary and certain
I pray: "Let all be still!"*

*Shahla Latifi
December 1st, 2017*

A new Dawn- Short Story

There was so much smoke of guilt; you could hardly see any faces. Though the large room was filled with men, it was still empty of life. Men of all ages wore different attires, mostly traditional Afghan clothing, sitting in a circle. At the center of the room was a faded brown and navy rug. The room had no windows, but an old wooden door that connected to a passage.

There was no life of prosperity and morality in this room; an overwhelming scent of bitterness pervaded. Despite loud talking and laughter, a feeling of depression was in the air.

The wooden door opened, and everyone fell silent. A tall, bony young man in a perahan tunban and wearing a bright traditional hat entered the room. His smile was angry; you could see the pain in his brown eyes, and the greedy audience welcomed his presence.

Hassan knew that he had to deliver pleasure to this sexually deprived group of men. He also knew the fear of a child being touched and watched by strangers. Those feelings of indecency and insecurity were familiar to him. As a young boy, he had gone through severe physical and sexual abuse, and as an adult, he knew all that violence and abuse manifested in his mind and corrupted his character. Even though he watched and helped his controlling stepfather provide boy dancers to ill-minded men for years, he never enjoyed being an enforcer and such a provider. Now that his stepfather had died, passing on to him the business, Hassan knew full well the enormity of vileness, and he also was fully aware the pain this experience could inflict on a child.

After his stepfather's death from a heart attack, Hassan did some soul searching, considering changes to his way of living. On the darkest days when he felt unloved and unworthy, he would remember himself as a ten-year-old boy whose young- widowed mother had to remarry a stranger, a battered man from northern Afghanistan in an Afghan refugee camp in Peshawar, Pakistan? a man who made a living by child exploitation. For him, a man of no importance with a demeaning character, it was easy to use desperate children and unwanted preteens around the refugee camps for making a profit. He was a man whose heart was drained of love and compassion. A man who faced misery all his life, now as an abuser himself, he felt powerful beyond measure. It seemed the abuse could contradict one of the most fundamental principles of life.

Soon after the marriage, Hassan's innocence was stolen by his stepfather. And every Friday night, he was taken to an unknown village in Peshawar to dance in front of strangers. Hassan had to perform his duty with no complaints. The man made sure that little boy understood his job well. As smart as he was, Hassan did exactly as his stepfather asked of him. He knew the man had a cruel and vicious character, and any mishap or mistake would inflict hostility. So, he practiced how to please his stepfather to spare himself and his mother any more pain.

His stepfather, who was raised in poverty, was abused as a child. He did not know any other way of living but to do precisely as he had been taught. Even in the deep part of his damaged soul, he had sympathy for his ten-year-old stepson, yet he continued treating the child the only way he knew how.

Hassan, holding his stepfather's hand, entered an old two-story house. The house, which his stepfather owned, was located in a quiet neighborhood. There was no sign of any wrongful activities. The house seemed deserted. Any movement sent up clouds of dust. The unfurnished front room led to passage and the basement.

The basement was cold and foggy, thrumming with loud music and the odor of cigarette smoke. Unpleasantness was in the air: the room was packed tight with men. Hassan's mind, working quick and furious, was full of unasked questions. He looked around him wildly. He couldn't focus. His mind and his heart rejected this reality. He kept a firm hold on his stepfather's hand, anxious to avoid his surroundings.

Suddenly the noise stopped. The audience applauded. Now, Hassan could see the room clearly. Several oil lamps brightened the room, illuminating men of many backgrounds and ages. A hint of mischief hung in the air. Hassan's exploring mind flooded with fear. The fear numbed his senses. His body realized a danger awaited him, and he gripped his stepfather's hand for support. But the man gave him an angry look and dropped his hand, pushing the little boy in the center of the room. The laughter and the excitement of the depraved men rose into Hassan's young heart. Even though he knew what to do?as his stepfather had coached him how to dance?it seemed he forgot everything in the midst of conflicting emotions.

As innocent as he was, he knew this was wrong. His mother told him once to be strong, try to carry the pain of unwanted feelings like a man. And when you grow out of your pain, you will become the kind of man that you wish to be. Despite his mother's plea, Hassan felt nothing but humility. The physiological pain penetrated his mental anguish. He just wanted to go home. He wanted to be with his mother. But a voice as loud as thunder woke up his senses. "Start, boy; why are you waiting? The music is playing!"

His body was rigid beneath his white perahan tunban.

With his hands resting on his waist, the little boy closed his brown eyes and started to spin left and right. The spinning dancer finally felt at ease. He couldn't hear anything. With his shoulder-length hair that floated in the air, the little dancer was focusing on an imaginary dove finding his way home...

The tall, bony man in the gray perahan tunban paused, looking around. He knew this crowd was all about finding a weakness, sniffing out vulnerability, and using it to their advantage and pleasure. He also knew that poverty, war, desperation, and illiteracy dulled people's minds. And one's life problems and emptiness don't give particular insight into anyone else's pain and issues.

The man behind all the pain and mischief, twenty-four-year-old Hassan, was broken. He always knew he was deceived by life, but he never thought he would become anything like his stepfather. In his heart he knew that he supposed to rescue children?not a child predator and abuser. And now, he had a chance to prove his real worth.

The audience grew jittery and loud. They wanted entertainment. They wanted to bury their unhappiness, guilt, and feelings of unspoken desire into a young dancer's spins.

Standing in the center of the basement that once was the ground of all his misery, Hassan spoke nervously:

"I never thought I would admit defeat, but my heart is not into this. As I promised my dying stepfather that I would continue running his business, I also promised my mother to bring prosperity to home and my surroundings. I don't think I could ever steal anyone's childhood. As I well remember the indignities I had to suffer in the early years of my life, I could never hurt a child or steal anyone's innocence. Let me tell you?when abuse occurs during childhood, it remains uppermost in the child's mind. So, I have decided to close this hole of misery once and for all. I will make amends for my wrongdoings and for helping my ill-minded stepfather for years. I used to be a coward about facing my fears, but now I am excited to help others."

Angry clients began to scream. The large room, filled with a frustrated audience, became a rotting war zone. The raging men cursed and swore at him, throwing things in the air. Hassan took a breath to collect himself, and with a commendable effort, he tried to calm them.

"Listen! I know that I have co-managed this place for five years and gave you physical and visual entertainment, but I can't bear it any longer. Let me tell you: I can't hurt children any longer. I know that you all might find some other ways to feed your addiction, but exploiters will be permanently banned here. Now, go and don't come back!"

The angry men scowled and muttered profanities, wanting him to give in to their demands. They still thought of him as a dancer?and a weak person.

Hassan was terrified of bad things that would happen to him. He knew some of these men were more dangerous than he realized. Despite the pounding in his fearful heart he had to look forward, not back. He knew Significant life changes were on the way, and he had to move on cautiously. He had already planned to take his mother and move out of the city. The first weeks and months ahead would be the hardest, he knew since he didn't have any backing and support, but he trusted his judgment. And he was sure for every dream washed away, new dawn can rise.

Shahla Latifi

01-13-2018

Blissful Silence

*My heart is filled with poems
Whenever I revisit my childhood
Every time my life is higher
When a gleam of light reflects the happiness of my heart
When my mind is thick with fear
When hidden feeling stretches its hands toward freedom
A poem thrills through me*

*I commit my thoughts to the heart of poetry with transparency
Each poem takes my hand in hers
Fills my heart with nothing but love*

*As the words wander deep within my mind
I become one with each word dancing on the earth of my heart
Then, amidst a blissful silence
My soul singing
The fragments of unspoken feelings swirl around me
Then a poem
A free poem
Strives against my wishes*

*Shahla Latifi
January 18th, 2018*

Short Poems- 6

*As I thought of you
My heart opened at the edge of silence
Suddenly
The warm feeling,
A soft smile
And the green scent of bliss took me by surprise*

*As I thought of you,
Summer stayed
The clumsy touch of winter had gone
My heart and blood,
My whole existence
Sensed delight*

~~~~~

*In the midst of summer  
I am thinking of those winter nights  
When the cold hovered over our garden  
The windows were gleaming white  
And my mother's caring hands  
Warmed my heart*

~~~~~

*When I speak my regrets aloud
Crying with no tears
I try to forgive and forget*

*For every hour I spent with you
I forgot the distance
I was dazzled by your wisdom
It was all good
It was all surreal*

And the scent of bliss was in the air

But now as I lament the loss of my heart to you

My trust evaporates

yet

I know by next spring

I'll allow my heart to reopen

To the single ray of love once again

~~~~~

*I'm too tired to think of you*

*As I'm trying to speak*

*Yet, my heart cries silently with fallen thoughts*

*I'm too tired to think of you*

*With attachment like a wave in the ocean*

*Yet, I can't leave you*

*My body is numb with no feelings*

*My thought bunched in a knot*

*My eyes gleaming with a new hope*

*And I rise above my expectation;*

*When I remember your saying: You are mine*

~~~~~

I am terrified of the storm

But no one can see my fear

As the wind blows,

Passes along the lake

My heart beats with fallen trees

There's a sound of terror in the air

The sky is dark

The stars are transported to the languishing fog

I want to think

Yet the ghostly, doleful wind blows above the tall trees

With more grief

~~~~~

*My pets are at their places  
Without notice, busy grooming  
The sun shines  
The lake covered with a lazy fog  
The heat casting pressure into the air  
Small birds from their lovely nests  
Peeking, singing, embracing one another in couples  
Under the reach of my happy wishes  
The mid-morning is growing  
And  
Through all the wonders of a hushed day  
With a passionate feeling, I feel privileged  
Unwary and certain  
I pray: "Let all be still!"*

*Shahla Latifi*

*02-25-2018*

## Aching Heart

*In the land of terror  
A girl cannot speak her mind  
She only sees darkness in the air  
She cannot read her own mind*

*In the land of war  
A girl lost in her own thoughts  
She faces the future with fear  
The darkness fits her aching heart*

*In the land of fadeless dreams  
A girl cannot be herself  
For her, nothing is real  
Nothing is possible  
And her youth is an expansion of despair*

*In the land of terror  
A girl cannot dream  
She only knows the eternal gleam*

*In the land of despair  
A girl is worn out, exhausted  
But still with a sparkle in her heart  
She quietly shouts for freedom and joy*

*Shahla Latifi  
March 17th, 2018*

## Darkness

*Sometimes*

*In darkness*

*Across the shallow thoughts*

*When the savage of impatience wakes me*

*I see*

*The impalpable ghost of despair*

*My heart cries*

*The happy and agile child in me cries:*

*I want to know what is through the light*

*I want to know another feeling*

*I want to know that behind this darkness a heart waits for me*

*Suddenly*

*Everything that exists in me*

*The passion*

*The beauty*

*Functions with implacable courage*

*And the lightness of my heart*

*Bright as the crystal moon*

*Through the fog of hopelessness*

*Shahla Latifi*

*04-25-2018*

## Blue Sky

*I wish you met me  
When the sky was always blue  
When the trees,  
The starry nights,  
The scent of apple blossoms  
Were fresh like the youthful me*

*I wish you met me  
When my heart was filled with dreams  
When my lips were full of happiness  
When my skin was fresh as a daisy in the spring*

*I wish you met me  
When my skirt grazed against the sunflowers in fun-filled summer  
When my eyes were ablaze with autumn colors  
When my hands glittered with snow*

*I wish you met me  
When my heart was as wild as the wind  
So I could look to you for guidance  
In the quietness of the night;  
And as I was turning cold with despair,  
I could lean on you with cherished dreams of delight*

*Now  
Whenever  
I get gloomy with life's events  
I wonder  
How would my life be different with you*

*Shahla Latifi  
June 3rd, 2018*

## Beneath the starry Night

*When I'm sad, I think of you  
When I'm alone without you  
I wish to lie down beneath the starry night with you*

*When I read about love  
When I create a new poem  
When the air of melancholy surrounds me, I think of you*

*I know you are far beyond my reach  
Yet, I can see you  
I can see your smile, reaches my heart  
I can hear your sound of silence, that provokes my thoughts  
And quietly  
I can feel the sense of love  
as it contemplates the image of happiness in my mind*

*Shahla Latifi  
July 30th, 2018*

## Secret Knowledge

*There is a feeling of betrayal  
When you are insulted by your husband time after time*

*Trembling  
Uneasy  
Wounded by each insult  
All the inspired moments  
All the gleaming thoughts  
All your happiness  
Along with the secret knowledge of believing in yourself are leaving your mind*

*But one day  
By craving life  
By hope and healing  
By crushing the weight of pain beneath a gray sky  
Your anguished spirit beating against your mind  
And you  
Wake up  
With a thousand happy dreams swirling around your heart*

*Shahla Latifi  
August 21st, 2018*

## My Lips

*My lips reveal a love  
Like the taste of a green apple-sour and refreshing,  
Reveals the true nature of love*

*When unwanted words  
Wounded and unsmooth exit from my lips  
Reveal the naked truth*

*My lips become alive  
Whenever I talk to you  
Like colored grapes in the summer  
Like a kiss of wind on my shoulder*

*Under the new moon  
When the delicate petals sway lightly on my feet  
When a happy shout cracks the bell of my conscious mind  
A bare dream  
A hidden secret  
A happy thought  
Run across my lips*

*Shahla Latifi  
September 15th, 2018*



## Troubled Midnights

*As the night breathes,  
I inhale the gasp of air*

*Bruised by the past  
I clasp my hands to the weave of moonlight with a surprise*

*My hair over the pillow  
My heart full of fear  
With faithful resentment in my eyes  
I find refuge in troubled midnights*

*As the night grows  
His touch  
His laughter  
The force of his body on mine  
Compels my imagination*

*But sometimes  
Many nights and many hours  
I remember a slice of the moon  
stealthily borrows my sorrows*

*Then  
Along the trampled edges of my mind  
The dark weaves of past  
Vanishes alongside the layers of the night*

*Shahla Latifi  
October 31st, 2018*

## Uncaring Touch

*The moment he reached for my breasts  
I froze up  
My inner fear awakened by my anger  
My skin felt cold  
My head felt heavy  
My body, numb with fear, tried to squirm free of his uncaring touch*

*Suddenly  
I remembered the advice of my mother:  
"Be obedient to your new husband!"*

*But brave me  
I never kept a jumble of meaningless words in my head*

*Shahla Latifi  
01-01-2019*

## A virtuous Woman

*A woman, a virtuous woman  
Never betray her virtues  
Yet  
She wants to explore the essence of her own*

*Her lips ripe as a fruit  
Her hands moist with excitement  
Her face lit up with the hidden truth  
She outlines her body in front of a sincere mirror*

*The delicate petals of her senses  
The exotic olive skin  
Her strong legs  
And her two tame breasts, the paragons of virtue  
Smile at her with a flickering glow*

*Shahla Latifi  
January 15th, 2019*

## My Imagination

*As the night breathes  
I inhale the gasp of air  
Bruised by the past  
I clasp my hands to the weave of moonlight with a surprise*

*My dark hair over the pillow  
My heart full of fear  
With faithful resentment in my eyes  
I find refuge in troubled midnights*

*As the night grows  
His touch  
His laughter  
The force of his body on mine  
Compels my imagination*

*But sometimes  
Many nights and many hours  
I remember a slice of the moon  
stealthily borrows my sorrows  
Then  
Along the trampled edges of my mind  
The dark weaves of past  
Vanishes alongside the layers of the night*

*Shahla Latifi  
February 1st, 2019*

## Courage

*A small bird on the edge of a tree  
Looked down on the pathway, unhappily*

*The garden flourished with flowers, shrubs, and trees  
It was quiet as the undisturbed sea*

*As the little bird wandered around alone  
She saw the water fountain in the corner of the garden, full  
She saw butterflies were comforted in the petals of roses, joyfully  
With her heart, full of worries  
She sat quietly amid an old oak tree*

*She started to think:  
Is there any other place more assuring?  
Would she ever find a life companion?  
How can she be happy and fulfilled?*

*The lonely bird cold as a naked tree  
Observed the world around her with high intensity*

*She was wondering and thinking:  
What if she breaks a wing?  
What if she falls from consciousness on a stormy night?  
What if she cannot open her eyes ever again?*

*Suddenly, deep in thought  
With only two wings of her own*

*Courage in her soul  
She flew into the heart of a joyous dream*

*Shahla Latifi  
March 1st, 2019*

## Inner Light

*When I am searching for what I do not have  
I leave my comfort zone to seek shelter from unwanted greed*

*As the hunger for need shines upon me  
It makes me immoderately hasty  
And thee innumerable path to roam  
Takes any enjoyment away*

*Days and evenings  
Endless changes in height and depth  
Like a bird beneath the flowing curves of a lawn  
I'm seeking shelter from an undesired deed*

*In the darkest depth of my worries  
As I swallow my unhappiness  
As turbulent as sea  
I spin in circles, like soundless waves lashed by a storm  
Weeping  
Motionless  
Yet alive  
I go in the deep place of my soul, seeking happiness*

*As I am sunken inside myself, sad and worried  
Suddenly  
The wings of my strength  
The voice of my wisdom  
Inner-light within me  
Frantically flap to set me free*

*Shahla Latifi  
March 31st, 2019*

## My Compelling Heart

*I believe I belong to me  
Whether I'm happy  
Or as gloomy as night  
I believe I belong to me*

*Even though my compelling heart fell in love numerous times  
Still, I believe I belong to me*

*Whenever I stare into my past  
When I become an image of the sad moon  
When the light of mindfulness moves the inner me  
With no doubt in my mind, I believe I belong to me*

*When the dark rim of life descends into my soul  
In the midst of all the stillness  
With the voice of any pain  
With all the unspoken isolation  
I try to gather my broken dreams  
Yet  
Beneath my confident smile  
Over the warmest wish  
With my eyes wide for all upcoming moments  
I raise up my strength with a shout:  
I belong to my affection  
I belong to my loyalty  
I belong to me!*

*Shahla Latifi  
May 3rd, 2019*



## Filled with Passion

*My mother was always saying:  
A woman, a virtuous woman  
Would never betray her virtues*

*My mother was always saying:  
When your eyes widen at the unknown  
And your heart is filled with passion  
Put out the flame of your desire*

*Far from her foggy thoughts  
Through the fire and stars  
Among passing years of youth  
I slept upon white cushions of imagination  
Unable to choose my "virtues", or "the true meaning of life"*

*Shahla Latifi  
May 25th, 2019*

## Silky Moon

*When I undress for him  
My body becomes a giving river  
The sense of passion starts to drizzle*

*When I undress for him  
As his heart warms mine  
The wave of desire slowly flows over him*

*When I undress for him  
The motherly instinct  
The emotions and worries  
The time  
The day  
The night before me  
Disappear into the mystic sea*

*When I undress for him  
A familiar silence fills up the room  
His heart starts beating fast  
Love ricochets in my head with the speed of an arrow*

*When I undress for him  
A thread of silky moon circles around our minds  
My thinking, his wishes  
His desire, my willingness  
His body, my soul, become one*

*Shahla Latifi  
June 7th, 2019*

## Shrewdness

*I'm talkative*

*I'm talkative of forbidden words*

*I'm talkative as a singing bird*

*Full of natural shrewdness*

*I'm talkative about life's unfairness*

*About the end of a gloomy song*

*About an injured soul that left sadness in my heart*

*Behind the thickest layer of my view*

*Free as a bird*

*Full of words of love*

*I'm talkative about imprisoned stars*

*I'm talkative*

*I'm talkative about a black stain in the middle of spring*

*About ripe roses that shudder under cold rain*

*I'm talkative*

*I'm talkative about the light of passion that led me on*

*I'm talkative about the dream that dampened my heart*

*Shahla Latifi*

*July 18th, 2019*

## Red Lipstick

*When I wear red lipstick  
I feel calm and refreshed  
I feel like a woman in love*

*When I wear red lipstick  
I feel a renewed energy  
I feel mightily glorious in the midst of regrets*

*To me, red lipstick is symbolic of taste and beauty that brings out a woman's boldness and independence. Red lipstick can overshadow any other feelings and adds to a woman's beauty, merit, and appeal. It symbolizes the willingness of a woman who likes to take risks and sheds light on her courage.*

*While growing up in Kabul, Afghanistan, I never saw a woman wear a shade of red lipstick or nail polish. Unlike other women who hid their true feelings under the pressure of a conservative society, I had a mind of my own. I was able to verbalize my true opinion and feelings. Also, in a keenly expectant way, I loved to value the colors of light, beauty, and love.*

*One day I asked my mother: "Why does no one wear red lipstick or nail polish? Why do you always wear the same shades, without color?" With clear surprise in her eyes, my mother calmly answered, "Red is not a good color for a woman! Red does not comply with our virtues."*

*For years that answer kept me wondering, why would a beautiful and vibrant color represent vice and iniquity? Why would a color that could transfer a smile to an unforgettable impression, a color that could boost energy, that could increase self-confidence be looked down upon?*

*Time passed. I grew up. My passion for red lipstick grew with me.*

*In college, I tried to maintain my modesty and self-effacement. Even though I started to wear lipstick, I stayed with neutral colors only. But as soon as my maturity kicked in, the boldness of my nature resurfaced, and I began to change. With my new-found attitude toward becoming an adult, I wanted to follow my taste and intuition. In trusting my instinct, I went for brighter-colored lipsticks. By wearing each, every day to match my dress or my blouse I felt invigorated. I felt my true self. I felt one of a kind.*

*But then, as a new bride with no concentration on myself, I lost the brighter side of my taste. I*

*became colorless. My mood was like a shade of gray, it reflected deep despair.*

*In my early twenties, a time of social and family turbulence, I lost my direction for pursuing my interests among other important things. As much as I wanted to adapt to all the negative stress and life tension and unfairness, the pressure diminished my judgment. Slowly, I crumbled under the pressure, and one by one I found the senses of light, love, and happiness were leaving me behind. And the shade of my lipstick paralleled the color of my depressed mood.*

*By my mid-thirties, as my brain and body had shed their worries and blossomed again, I embraced the time and difficulties that did not change me, but rather unfolded me to who I was in the midst of all. With the joy of understanding and acceptance, my inner beauty and strength fully matured and I started to care about color and beauty again.*

*Self-realization requires a tremendous amount of patience and wisdom based on experience, full growth, and strong work ethic. I know this now. I know that the vision and the boldness of a woman's courage are born, nurtured, and consolidated in her from birth. No shade of lipstick or nail polish can identify her true nature and beauty. But again, the color is important. Every color is a composition of inner desires and mental stability toward meaningful dignity.*

*Now, in my forties, with all the uptightness of society under my feet, raw and bolder than ever, occasionally I enjoy the audacity of red. With every bit of my unique taste of fashion to symbolize the inner sense of my body, I do wear a shade of red. And now and then, with a feeling of deep pleasure, I look within myself and see the reflection of light, color, and beauty.*

*Shahla Latifi*

*August 20th, 2019*

## Strange Curiosity

*As a girl  
With a strange curiosity  
I watched my mother,  
How she endured the drain of her beauty*

*Her youth was so brief  
Her life seemed meaningless  
Beneath all her hushed whispers  
Was the voice of a woman who preferred to be free*

*As a girl  
With a restless voice  
I could not scream  
I could not cry aloud,  
To grieve for the songbirds who suffered a sudden death*

*As a girl  
Humming in the garden  
I watched the caterpillars,  
Transform into butterflies on the arms of ripe roses*

*As a girl  
I saw stars illuminate the night  
The rain, behind the window  
The wind in the arms of a living evening  
Carrying me away to unknown shores*

*As a girl  
Every time I parted my lips to complaints  
I would be in trouble*

*But still,*

*With love on my shoulders  
Holding my head high  
I stared far above the free stars*

*Shahla Latifi*

*October 1st, 2019*

## Building my Self-Discipline

*? For me, a woman with a free mind and an unconventional approach to life, working out is a powerful motivator toward a healthier life. Rather than clinging to the webs of uptightness that play an important role in Afghan culture, or wishing for better life without earning it, I set specific goals and formulate plans to navigate my mind, spiritually and emotionally. ? ?*

*I started Pilates thirteen years ago at home, unsure of how to achieve my ambition to become good at it. I felt the need to come out of my shell. I had a natural tendency to build a good habit of exercising and improving my physical and mental health, but still, I was skeptical about it. Since I did not have a specific strategy, guidance, and support to adhere to any exercise routine, I felt stressed and unmotivated. I undoubtedly knew that if I wanted to achieve something, I must take a step forward and face new challenges. But how? How to start a plan with no guidance? How to determine the importance and relevance of my ideas and ambitions? How can I approach my goals with no fear? How do I identify my talents and errors? How can I build and appraise my abilities?*

*? Suddenly my heart sparkled with anticipation. From the core of my wisdom, ambition whispered in my ear: If you want to make a dream true, step forward and don't hesitate! Once I decided to wake up and follow my goal, it helped regulate my mind and it boosted my energy to step toward the new tests of life. ? Slowly, with minor accomplishments, I was motivated purely by the result.*

*As time went by, I focused on my goal by increasing the amount of time I spent on the Pilates mat, and slowly I worked my way up?first to fifteen minutes, then to twenty-five, then to thirty-five... ?*

*Determined to break down the wall of fear and low self-esteem, I came to a realization that, when adding up the time and effort to my Pilates routine, not only had I crossed the bridge of fear, it also purified my mind and directed me to step out of my comfort zone. ?*

*As life is constantly changing, a strong person with a vigorous mindset takes life as it comes. For me, a self-reliant woman with no shoulder to lean on, changes can be overwhelming. Sometimes under the pressure of life, I could forget about my health and well-being. And as I carry the burden of responsibilities alone, sometimes I unwittingly neglect myself. Of course, the lack of care for myself leads to self-doubt, weakness, and a negative sense of inability and great aptitude for success. ?*

*In 2013, as I fell into the depth of depression, I stopped doing Pilates. With each passing day, I became more and more consumed with life events. With every new experience and problem, I was somehow altered. ?*

*Time was passing. Year after year, apart from my abusive marriage, life was unfolding. At the end of 2015, I moved to embrace a different approach to life, one where I saw my strength, abilities, and areas where there was room to grow. I knew if I eliminated fear, disruption, and personal weakness,*



*I might achieve a healthy balance and take control of my life. ? With such understanding and acceptance, my mind started to open up more. My heart began moving faster within. My skin, hair, and body, previously neglected through carelessness, loneliness, regained my attention. Determined with certainty, I started to take care of myself. With proper planning and a positive attitude, I began simple steps toward a healthier me.*

*Day by day, struggling up my dream ladder, I realized the difference any change in daily routine can make. I realized any improvement over time is an astonishing achievement, an achievement founded on rationality and intelligence that secures our positive thinking, and makes us more driven in life. ?*

*Standing tall on the edge of my dream, my eyes opened to the depth of that goal. I could see myself as a shining example of courage and integrity. I could see a woman who never abandoned her dreams, a woman who fought for her goal. I could see a woman who moved through her life with difficulties, yet never lost her mind and self-worth.*

*? By holding on to that aspiration, I felt free. My longing heart, thirsty for happiness and success, gave me a hand of boldness and confidence. With a heart full of courage I went on with my dream.*

*? It's a new year. I am striving toward a better me. I would like to improve my workout routine. This year I want to add some positive reinforcement to my personal boundaries and reward myself by joining a personal training gym. ?*

*Keene is a good trainer. With her, I am progressing. She knows the level of my performance and she is eager to strategize a great plan for me. With Keena, I am myself. I'm able to formulate her ideas to start a positive journey toward betterment. With her experience, I craft a long-term workout plan that fits me. Even though I am sometimes overwhelmed by the intensity of workout routines, I won't disappoint her or myself. I will give myself a chance to learn and develop a sense of purpose and consistency. I will learn to be patient, to nurture my body and mind. I will learn to be persistent and organize my time for exercise. I will learn to be a good listener and increase my motivation to achieve. I will learn to condition my body and mind against any fear and anxiety.*

*? Nine months have passed from my training exercises. Yet, as the days go by I make a conscious effort to do better. I have learned to make level-headed decisions and feel more satisfied with my life activities. As I acknowledge my shortcomings and own up to my physical and mental flaws, I try to work on building my self-discipline and consistency. By picking up positive physical activity habits, I feel stronger. I feel like I'm ready to step up to the next level of exercise. I am ready to join an intense and more enjoyable gym. ?*

*I'm a little bit anxious. Wearing my new sneakers, I step into the Orange Theory Fitness. I am here with a good mindset to accomplish something that I never thought was possible. Even though I feel a little under pressure and discouraged among the fit women and men (who look like they exercise every day), I am here to put aside the feeling of intimidation, to work hard, and wipe off my sweat with a smile.*

*Since the gym specializes in group fitness, it's a very motivating environment for me. And I think I can adjust to this new exercise plan with speed and efficiency. ?*

*Two years have passed since my serious workout plan began. Now, I sense an inner calm. My mood stays almost the same all day. My body functions better. My skin is vivacious and clear. I have vibrant energy throughout the day. I'm happier, and the stress of life is under my control. The exercise showed me the importance of positive changes. With exercise, I can bounce back when things are going crazy. As soon as I learned how to dedicate a portion of my day solely for my benefit, I picked up good habits to pursue the object of my dedication and adjust my body and mind amid life's unpredictability. ?*

*This year, I have an exhilarating goal in mind. A goal that I always wanted to achieve. Since my passion for tennis is strong, and I have always enjoyed watching tennis, positive mental energy is pulling me toward that game. Having not been born into an athletic family, I must admit my passion for tennis runs unnaturally deep?it's always been a part of me. After serious consideration of all the aspects of playing tennis, I have decided to sign up with Yacht Club tennis lessons. ?*

*My tennis instructor, Joe, is knowledgeable. He communicates clearly and concisely. Regardless of the depth of my love for tennis, I need to learn proper techniques. As I am willing to practice and stay dedicated to my passion for tennis, I believe that with Joe's professionalism, level of maturity, and good personality, I will climb the ladder of learning the sport. With a clear intention, I am willing to execute the skills of the game until I reach my full potential and ability.*

*To me, tennis is a form of art. Tennis is rich in elegance and beauty. When I am on the court, when I feel the touch of sun on my skin, when the wind blows my hair, when my heart beats with excitement, when I follow the ball with my gaze, when I hit the ball over the net, when I hear a compliment from my coach... Again and again, I feel free. ?*

*As I remain active and trying to reach a certain level of productivity, I become more aware of myself. Once buried under the clouds of despair and tiresome routines, now I feel happy and relaxed. I can see my days without darkness. I rely on my intellectual capacity to retain my sanity. I listen to my children without nagging or arguing constantly. And I look at myself without pity! ? As I am infusing my life with positive energy, I will not postpone any important and constructive plan for the future. I will concentrate on the present and enjoy every fall and rise. ? The expectations we set for ourselves will impact our mind and soul. Doing exercise, paying attention to myself, and following the path of progress and productivity gave me the push I needed to awaken my mind, body, and soul. As I stay with my workout plan and increase the time I spend doing it, I feel happier and more confident. Truly inspired by positive changes in my body and mind, I am optimistic for the road ahead and I'll continue to excel in my goals and stay focused toward the things that matter most.*

*Shahla Latifi*

*January 1st, 2020*

## Gloominess

*Sometimes,  
Gloominess?this hidden mystery lingers on my shoulders*

*With gloominess, my worries grow deeper*

*When I'm gloomy  
My heart gets cold  
My keen mind awake,  
But there is no light to see my thoughts*

*Gloominess?this unwanted visitor  
Shuffles the power of emptiness*

*When I am gloomy  
I can't read  
I can't think  
I can't bear a sudden thought of abandonment  
Yet,  
Behind the shadow of gloominess  
I want to write about the sun,  
About the last deep hours of dawn*

*Gloominess?this whisper of sadness  
Fumbles to stay in my head  
With the wind murmuring through my room  
From my heart to my palms  
Gloominess swelters in its unified way of being*

*As I write  
My fingers fidget like a sleepy bird  
My soul half-filled with grief  
Still,*

*I can remember the blue sky  
The sudden rush of spring wind that muddles the air*

*I can still remember  
The wailing of the high wind by the mountain  
Voices of children by the hillside  
The beautiful colors of autumn leaves  
And the whisper of my mother on a bleak midwinter's night*

*Then,  
Over the shadow of my childhood memories  
The fair joy of life returns to me*

*Shahla Latifi  
February 1st, 2020*

## Empty of Love

*I am afraid one day  
When the time is perfectly still  
When your heart is empty of love  
When you are the saddest of beings  
You will agonize me*

*Swiftly in your imagination  
True in your heart  
Without exploding in anger  
The star of my memories will escape your heart*

*Alone  
Every second  
Then and tomorrow  
You'll close your tired eyes  
With the memories of your heart touching mine*

*I'm afraid one day  
On a gloomy fall evening  
Or in the light of a spring day  
In the midst of a summer night  
Or on a cold winter Sunday  
Your wishful heart will hear the news of me passing*

*Suddenly,  
Your lips still sealed  
Your heart full of secrets,  
Undoubtedly  
With no stop,  
With traces of my voice in your ears,  
With the moon of my presence in your window,*

*You will cry yourself into a very deep sleep*

*Shahla Latifi*

*March, 1st 2020*

## I Wonder

*I wonder*

*Why in the midst of hidden truth*

*We have forgotten the song of love?*

*I wonder*

*Why we mourn something that has been dead in our chest?*

*I wonder*

*Why between trickles of blood, the naked truth is living?*

*Why in the thick layers of dawn,*

*All our stress is sleeping?*

*I wonder*

*Why above the dry lakes, the clouds cry with gladness?*

*Why among the lost happy days*

*We are searching for the thrill of sadness?*

*Shahla Latifi*

*May, 1st 2020*

## My conclusion and thoughts on The Crime and Punishment- A book by Fyodor Dostoevsky

*Long before I started reading Crime and Punishment, I was interested in the study of the minds of criminals. With a lot of research (reading, watching documentaries, etc.), I concluded that no human is meant to kill other humans. Some individuals are born with neurological weaknesses or imbalances that can drive them to murder others. People are also the result of their upbringings, and sometimes a harsh childhood may lead to a damaged mind.*

*From my understanding, cold-blooded murderers usually have an abusive childhood or a dark past. From the beginning, they are often suffocated internally under tough and unhappy circumstances and will develop into an adult who struggles with living an average life.*

*As I studied more into the depth of their psyche, I discovered that criminals are mainly thirsty for revenge and ignore any consequences for their actions so they can feed the hunger that has been built up by loneliness, pain, betrayals, and feelings of abandonment. Mostly as children and teens, these people were not able to express their inner fears, thoughts, or sources of pain to anyone. In many cases, they are victims of abuse and brutality themselves, or they might have witnessed harsh treatment as a child. In other cases, they have suffered at the hands of people they trusted the most.*

*On the other hand, sometimes, a well-nurtured young adult will commit a brutal crime for no real purpose. In these cases, there is no motive other than to feed their sinful desires. These people were only born with imbalances in their brains, which leads them to commit these cruel acts. In those cases, a flaw in their nature, not an abusive or dark past, usually creates the criminals. In any case, life has been unfair to them; any feelings of compassion and remorse are not within their hearts. Pain and depression have clouded their emotion.*

*By studying Raskolnikov's character in Crime and Punishment, I have categorized him as a victim of physiologic compromise. Raskolnikov had a settled and normal childhood with loving parents who surrounded him with affection, and received a good education. He never suffered tremendously as a child or teen. He was cherished and surrounded by love and care. Unlike other cold-blooded murderers, however, Raskolnikov berated himself constantly. Also unlike many killers, he was brilliant and intelligent with good looks and a promising future. When he went through an extended period of depression and poverty, he felt less human. He thought that he deserved better, and his mother and sister, who depended on his education and future, deserved better. He felt betrayed by life when it stole all joy and comfort from him. He felt ashamed that the unpredictable and cruel wheel of fortune had placed him on the lower part of existence. All of these factors made him desire more from life and led him to manifest dark intentions. However, he hated all the struggles that took place in his mind. He hated living for the sake of living and thought that was all that he was doing. But all along, a healthy, happy, and compassionate human being still resided deep inside him, beneath all his troubles, doubts, and darkness.*



*Raskolnikov was very kind to the poor. He continuously gave to the less fortunate. He felt their pain and saw himself in them. His humanity reached the souls of injured, needy, and betrayed with love and admiration. He was bright toward others, yet depressed inside; so alive, yet internally dead; so loving, yet felt betrayed by life; so compassionate, yet so willing to kill.*

*He committed the crime in such a planned and calculative manner that it even surprised himself. It was his remorse for what he did that shocked him more. His tender heart, which was full of love for humanity and kindness, couldn't take the burden of such cruelty. In combination with his intellect, the weight of his conscience created a toxic feeling of remorse that sent him on a downward spiral. In the end, he was finally at peace. He knew that he had wronged others and deserved to suffer, but still wanted to live and love again. Unlike other killers, Raskolnikov was remorseful, and a ray of compassion still shined through him. He sought to better himself so he could atone for all the pain he caused.*

*By studying criminal minds and Raskolnikov's character, I have become more compassionate and more aware of how our behavior and characteristics affect our children and their future. We give our children so little, yet we expect much in return. We get so caught up in the hardships of life that we do not pay attention to their feelings, needs, or emotional welfare. And unfortunately, sometimes these things can result in very disappointing outcomes and even heartbreak.*

*Shahla Latifi*

*June 15th, 2020*

## Emptiness

*My nights are empty  
Empty of romance  
Empty of pleasure  
Empty of sex*

*My nights are empty  
Empty of greed  
Empty of desires  
Empty of sorrow and regrets*

*But when the moon is fallen beside me  
When the stars are sleeping under the pillow of my affection  
When my head is leaning over the horizon  
The emptiness closes*

*Shahla Latifi  
August 29th, 2020*

## Self- Worth

*As humans, we all need love. We crave intimacy and comfort. We need a shoulder to lean on in the dark days and in the stormy nights. We need someone to consider a confidant, a friend, a helper, a lover, and a better half.*

*But what if this bond with another person is not as strong as we think? What if we live unfulfilled, and the person we love is unworthy of our devotion? What if we know the core of the problems that affect our bond, but we lack the courage or the knowledge to fix it? What if we are afraid to move forward alone? What if we feel entitled to stay, and we suffer silently inside?*

*As we grow, we gain wisdom. By committing mistakes, we build experience. And finally, we discover how meaningful life can be.*

*We have to know that a solid relationship needs more than love; it requires mutual respect, understanding, and loyalty to remain healthy. A relationship is doomed without any of these essentials.*

*We should be more cautious of how a relationship will progress by learning about our partner.*

*We all should know that by mutual respect and support, a trusting relationship will develop. To keep a relationship alive, we have to master how to communicate, how to show admiration and love for one another, and how to avoid shutting down emotionally.*

*Since no relationship can survive on its own, intimacy will triumph through emotional support and love. But if we feel oppressed, depressed, ignored, and shut down in a relationship, we must depend on our self-esteem and self-worth. We must be courageous enough to move forward in life without fear of the future.*

*Shahla Latifi*

*November 2nd, 2020*

## TO Rise Again

*At the tender age of fourteen, she felt old. Her small body couldn't take it anymore. Her hands were tired of working all day. Her brain was bare of new thoughts. Her eyes missed the ray of happiness. As fair-minded as she was, she felt hopeless and depressed.*

*Even though she existed sheltered from the outside world, growing up reserved in an abandoned village, she was all emotions and intelligence. She had a vibe, a gift of nature that connected her to the other side of reality.*

*With all her life problems, her mind was locked up in a prison. Still, she never felt that she was missing anything in life, and she lived without feelings of regret. But she sensed the faintest flavor of abnormality in her surroundings. She couldn't imagine why there was such a difference between her inner world and reality. In the back of her mind, there was always a vision, a dream of her heart. In her audacity, she contemplated that dream in her mind, wondering if things would or could ever change.*

*One cold winter night, the most wonderful thing happened: Her father, the only living creature she knew and loved, was asleep. The little mud house was dark and quiet. The moon was full.*

*Even though she loved her father, the lonely middle-aged man drowning in sorrow, she knew his intention was not to hurt her. He regarded her, his fourteen-year-old daughter, as his property, an idea she hated. She wished him to have a little bit of solitude, a little bit of peace.*

*After the death of her mother, her father ordered her to become the woman of the house. At first, she thought that was the only way to live. Lost in anger and resentment, she had to accept her mother was gone and that she had to fill her mother's shoes. That was a great burden to bear.*

*Her father, a man in his forties, had a demanding personality. He never treated her mother as a human, and he looked at his child as an object. Every day, he spent his hours in the shack outside with his carpentering work.*

*He was a good carpenter. Using tree branches and stamps, he manufactured chairs and tables and other small accessories, selling them in the neighboring towns. To him, cutting, shaping, carving, and playing with wood was a great way to deal with his anger and frustration. He was a man with many dislikes, and he felt he had nothing to live for. He was strong and capable, but inside he was a broken man. A man who had seen the evil of the world.*

*When a person is hurt or has been used and damaged over time, and if she or he has no resources to get help, that person can never care for others. But her father, after the death of his wife, became*

*a living soul. He realized the enormity of his sorrow and the fearful responsibility of a parent. As much as he felt strained by a sudden change, he was destined to do the right thing. He had to break the emotional boundary between himself and his daughter.*

*But he did not know what to say, how to start, and how to heal the deep wounds that formed a chasm between them. Although he considered himself damaged goods, somehow in the core of his being, at the essence of his soul, he was an innocent and terrified boy who took everyday beatings at the hands of his angry mother. Yet, who had a heart full of love and dreams.*

*That feeling of inner peace of his boyhood had never before resurfaced. He had kept all the good and the bad inside with no trace of hope and desire to heal.*

*Now, he stepped into the other side of reality.*

*At first, his mind swirled, overwhelmed with the idea of how to get close to his only child, to heal past transgressions. He was angry with himself. He hated the complexity of life. But he had to break the shell of self-unworthiness; he must forgive and forget his past to give the gift of a normal life to his only daughter.*

*As the power of good intentions can soothe pain, suddenly he felt at ease.*

*It was a starry night. Lying on the mattress, she thought of her mother, the ray of goodness that she kept in her heart. Every time she was feeling lonely, unwanted, and unloved, she found solace with good memories of her mother.*

*Tonight her small body was weak, but her inner feelings were as vivid as the moonlight. Her imagination led her aching and feverish body to a beautiful dream.*

*As her heartbeat with excitement, she saw herself in a green meadow far from home. The beauty and calming effect of the green scenery, a garden full of fruits. The brightness of the sun like she had never seen it before, the sound of water streaming, the chirping birds and the autumn breeze and colorful leaves all around gave her the energy of love and awareness of her surroundings.*

*In the midst of all things, she heard a soothing sound: a mixture of joy and laughter.*

*Intrigued, she moved closer, finding that the pain she carried on her small shoulders, all the insecurity she had faced in her short life, and all the bitterness she endured disappeared. Her keen mind had suffered loneliness and abandonment; her thoughts were always at the urge of giving up. Her demeanor was now shifting to the gentle way of life.*

*She saw children playing happily, and was captivated by their joyful sound alongside the blissful feeling of freedom, the warmth of the sun, and the green scenery filled with an infusion of peace and light. She felt relaxed, soaking up all the energy.*

*Panicky and breathless, she was overcome by the blend of excitement and steely desire to stay. She did not want to lose such a feeling of complete and unmitigated love. She didn't want to be alone again. In the midst of all, she sensed her mother's infectious smile upon her. She felt loved and wanted.*

*The wooden door of her small room opened. The room smelled fresh and alive, a glass full of fresh wildflowers on the old nightstand. A tiny window let in light.*

*The man walked into the room and saw his daughter wrapped in a blanket, deep in sleep. Suddenly, a noise: She was crying, murmuring in her dreams.*

*Confused, he didn't know what to do. He had never been close to her as a father, never had been a shoulder for her to cry on. Three years without her mother around, the child grew in the dark all alone. And now that he wanted to be a father and make things right, he didn't know what to do.*

*The young girl writhed in agony, burning up in a fever. She looked so fragile. Putting a hand on her damp forehead, the man noticed for the first time the similarities between him and his child. Her soft brown hair, her tanned fair skin, her straight and narrow nose, and her thin lips resembled his. He was astonished.*

*"How can I help her?" he asked himself, his heartbreaking within his soul. He was afraid he wouldn't be able to rescue his daughter; he thought of her fragile body slipping into the stream of pain and drifting away.*

*He felt hopeless. He blamed himself for the reason she was suffering.*

*All he ever wanted was to hide from the reality of their situation, but now, without the fear of what the future would hold, the only thing he wanted was for his daughter to wake up, to survive.*

*A wave of panic shook his heart. His hands were trembling, his mind flooded with fear. For the first time, he wanted to cry. There was no time to waste. His daughter needed him, needed his fatherly arms and confidence around her.*

*Yet he felt confused and hopeless. Rattled by his daughter's distress, a single thought of bravery encapsulated his mind, forcing him to face the darkest demons. He left the room and hurried back with a jug of cold water and a small, wet towel. He stood in front of his ill child's bed, simultaneously*

*agitated and frozen with fear. In a sudden state of alertness, he moved closer to the bed, placed the towel on the nightstand, and reached for his daughter. His tears flowed like raindrops, but he did not care. All his pride, self-righteousness, shame, wrath, and vengeance had never deserted him, and now they were near the breaking point.*

*With a bittersweet smile on his face, he felt free of pain. For the first time, he wanted to be a father. He wanted to break the cycle of abuse and neglect. He wanted to make up for his past mistakes and regrets and look to the future. And he wanted his only child to accompany him on that journey. He wanted to see her happy and well. He wanted to make her laugh. He wanted her to blossom like a flower, and for her to never see sunrise with tearful eyes again.*

*With that powerful feeling of fatherly love, he tried to banish his fear. Suddenly he found contentment in the midst of loss and grief. And he knew by helping his only child, he was also helping the lost boy who had been living in sorrow for so long...*

*Shahla Latifi*

*01-20-2021*