

Excerpts from “D’ua”

Stones show their love to me
Stone rain
All I see is stone
Enough to build a citadel

I have never seen such a crowd
My dad, the first love of my life
My brother, the uncle who used to pass by
The grandfather who never said good-bye

There is anger in their eyes
If they could only see my love

Love is what made them merciless,
Became the black burdened curtain that fell over their pupils

My mom stands on the street corner
Still, pretending to watch
Next to her,
Sisters, friends stand with cloud eyes

I loved you then
I love you now

Stone, stone,
I loved a boy from the other zone
Oh, and he loved me back
Stone,
It was love that made them lose control

The first stone came from my dad
Stone after stone
Made me numb
Stone after stone
I felt how much I was loved

Stone after stone
My skin began talking

My knees surrender
My heart says, Hold on
You don't want to miss this
There is an urge that makes all this tender

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“With poetry, you can speak from someone else’s mouth.” That’s what first drew Lava to the genre. There is mystery in that, a mystery that Lava enjoys. How can words come from you and yet be outside you?

Her first poem, written at the age of eight, was an ode to friendship. A friend of hers bought a notebook and together they exchanged friendship poems the way other friends would necklaces or bracelets. After years of experimentation, she remains unclear about the purpose of poetry. There are so many poems. So many poets. For each, the purpose differs. Lately, though, she has settled on this definition:

“When you call what you’ve written ‘a poem,’ you are trying to show someone how to read what you’re saying.” Each line, each stanza shows the reader a smaller piece of thought within the longer sentence.

Lava, born and raised in Sulaimani, a Kurdish city in northern Iraq, didn’t read poetry in English until her years at university. The first poem she remembers is Plath’s “Cut.” Plath has cut her thumb, and the verses she writes contain metaphor after metaphor about the small violence she has done herself. Lava laughs as she paraphrases the poem: “I hurt my finger! Look at it! Look at it! All those images—it was so creepy.” The poem left her paralyzed, turning the lines over and over in her

mind. “The images she used gut me.” Lava found that no matter where she looked in the poem, she saw Plath. That, she decided, was how she hoped her readers would feel.

Her poetry consistently chooses no side except love’s. Amid all the tension around her—Arab and Kurdish, Christian and Yezidi, man and woman, victim and aggressor—she finds the love that can be present and writes from that perspective. “Love has been criticized over and over and over again here,” she says. “Society, religion, everyone thinks love is overrated, but for me, it’s the strongest, healing thing.” Though no one has asked her, she quickly adds, “I’m not in love. No. I don’t mean romantic love, but *human* love.”

Photograph courtesy of the author