

SARA

Night Time Is a Dark Time

Lightning is the sky
tearing itself apart
for attention.
Stars need shadows
to shine.
The faded moon
lingers on with the sun,
mourning over
stolen darkness.
We now pay the price
in dead moths,
electricity bills,
and lost melatonin.
All for a few
hours of waking
when we really
should be
dreaming.

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Sara was born in Baghdad. She lived in the United Arab Emirates for most of her life. She came to Sulaimani to attend AUIS. She comes from a half-Kurdish, half-Arab family. Whenever people ask her where she's from, she asks, "Are you ready?"

She didn't feel the ethnic division in the UAE. She had friends from all nationalities. They considered her simply Iraqi. But, in Iraq, you are either Kurdish or Arabic. She doesn't want to identify herself with either. It was only when she came back to Sulaimani that she started to give this thought. She lives with her grandmother, her mother's mother, her Kurdish side. Either for fun or curiosity, that side of the family always asks—Kurdish or Arab? "There's nothing wrong with being a little of both," she says. In university, she speaks Arabic with her Arab friends and Kurdish with her Kurdish friends. When friends



cast around for ethnic answers, she gives them information about her parents and no definitive answer. “There is none,” she says. She’s reaching for accuracy, not ease.

She has always been a reader. After she graduated from high school, she took a gap year to wait for her younger sister, Lana, to graduate. They would attend college together. During that year, she got a job at a bookstore. With time on her hands, even at work, she would read and write. Her supervisor, “a real book geek,” introduced her to many authors. “I picked up Sylvia Plath, and he told me I was too young to read it. He gave me

Edgar Allan Poe instead.” She began her reading life with the Brothers Grimm. Her mom would have new books ready for the girls whenever they finished the old ones. Sara got into the big books once she got a public library card. She borrowed whenever she could, even on school days. Even if she had exams, she would steal an hour before bed to read.

She began to write poetry on a family trip to Syria. Her grandfather, a poet, would write short verses for Sara and Lana. Sara decided to write something for him in return. “It was in Arabic, with meter, about the sun. It was horrible,” she laughs. She kept writing but wouldn’t show the poems to anyone other than Lana. She didn’t even keep most of them. “I’ve tossed my poems around,” she says. She used to write a poem and simply let it go. Now, she tries to challenge herself. She revises. She reminds herself, “Don’t brush this off.” She sees “poetry isn’t something to be ashamed of. It gives you a way to show ordinary images of everyday life.”

Photograph by Erin Trieb