Claims Poetry

Lisa Suhair Majaj

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Lisa Suhair Majaj - Claims

I am not soft, hennaed hands,
a seduction of coral lips;
not the enticement of jasmine musk
through a tent flap at night;
not a swirl of sequined hips,
a glint of eyes unveiled.
I am neither harem's promise
nor desire's fulfillment.
I am not a shapeless peasant
trailing children like flies;
not a second wife, concubine,
kitchen drudge, house slave;
not foul-smelling, moth-eaten, primitive,
tent-dweller, grass-eater, rag-wearer.
I am neither a victim
nor an anachronism.
I am not a camel jockey, sand nigger, terrorist,
oil-rich, bloodthirsty, fiendish;
not a pawn of politicians,
nor a fanatic seeking violent heaven.
I am neither the mirror of your hatred and fear,
nor the reflection of your pity and scorn.
I have learned the world's histories,
and mine are among them.
My hands are open and empty:
the weapon you place in them is your own.
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I am the woman remembering jasmine,
bougainvillea against chipped white stone.
I am the laboring farmwife
whose cracked hands claim this soil.
I am the writer whose blacked-out words
are birds' wings, razored and shorn.
I am the lost one who flee,
and the lost one returning;
I am the dream, and the stillness,
and the keen of mourning.
I am the wheat stalk, and I am
the olive. I am plowed fields young
with the music of crickets,
I am ancient earth struggling
to bear history's fruit.
I am the shift of soil
where green thrusts through,
and I am the furrow
embracing the seed again.
I am many rivulets watering
a tree, and I am the tree.
I am opposite banks of a river,
and I am the bridge.
I am light shimmering
off water at night,
and I am the dark sheen
that swallows the moon whole.
I am neither the end of the world
nor the beginning.

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