

## An Excerpt from *Kamikaze Death Poetry*

### A Brief Introduction to *Kamikaze Death Poetry*

Arising out of a tradition held by World War II Japanese Kamikaze pilots to place pen to paper one last time, *Kamikaze Death Poetry* comes to you now after a labyrinthine journey.

Ramona Waters, an American student at the time, gained the translation rights to the “lost” Kamikaze poems in 1963. For over twenty years, she worked to unearth and translate the complete collection of what she named “the Kamikaze Death Poems.” Upon her own death in 1987, Waters, who had emigrated many years previously to the Middle East for a variety of political and religious reasons, left the unfinished collection in the hands of her friend, Ali Hassan, an Iraqi poet and bookstore owner. Hassan completed the English translation and also began an Arabic translation of the text. In 1997, Hassan passed this task on to Jali al-Ogedi, a thirteen year old girl with remarkable promise for scholarship and a unique talent for composing poetry. By 2001, al-Ogedi began actively training with the Tawhid and Jihad group in order to carry out attacks against American involvement in Iraq. On June 27, 2003, Jali al-Ogedi became one of three suicide bombers to attack a group of American soldiers just outside Baghdad. Koa Tomase, one of the American soldiers entrusted with questioning al-Ogedi’s surviving family, found and confiscated this collection of poems, believing that perhaps the book was filled with Tawhid and Jihad plans or secrets. Soon after, Tomase went AWOL and brought the collection of “Kamikaze Death Poems” to literary agent, Rosalie Rivera in New York. Tragically, soon after Rivera agreed to represent the work, Tomase was stabbed three times in the chest by a mugger who was not caught. He died several hours later.

We offer *Kamikaze Death Poetry* to you now in memory of the many hands that helped these unusual yet deeply human stories survive.

The Editors  
2008

## Prologue

we are schooled as kamikaze artists  
to inaugurate our own deaths with words

we are all moving toward our own deaths  
with the awkward speed of an antique bomber

we are not unique we measure life in war  
and reconciliation we surprise ourselves

with our own vengeance and then forgive  
ourselves readily when we are at peace

we hold dear chaotic memory we only  
understand as we are ending that we never

understand anything at all

that is the way until we find another

Editors' note: this "Prologue" to the rest of the collection represents the efforts of at least 3 different writers. Ramona Waters, Ali Hassan and Jali al-Ogedi all clearly contributed to the crafting of this introductory piece.

*from* The Poems

What did I do to you?  
There is the ocean air – there – is this the final breath?  
Why are there only questions?

Three white cranes are laughing.  
I mourn for my eyes.

Three silly girls with creamy knees standing against the schoolyard wall – I  
can't stop thinking of them.

A man placing bets  
counts his money underneath  
storm clouds.

I am only waiting.  
I am only waiting.

These are my eyes  
and the mountain leans too close –

I am the dust at its base.

There is no fear to stop me.  
There is no anger to stop me.  
There is no love to stop me.  
There is no death.

In her wizened palm, my mother held  
the acorn – do you see? Do you see, my son?

If I were to lose the courage now, she would never take me back into her arms –  
I would die anyway – and that is the ultimate puzzle. I swallow the bloom  
of her mouth again and again – that kiss is over.

I memorized 300 poems at school.  
I was a wise boy – women  
winked at the market – I was all aflame  
with their charm. Now, I burn.

She will not remember her father.

The sun sips the sky until it is drowning.  
I am circling my prey.

If I am strong, the world will finally let us be.

A wall I am responsible for cleaning –  
the drip of water into the bucket –

please shake these miserable photographs free –  
I am not ready to forget them.

The flower I will throw over the mountain  
mocks my trembling hands –  
cowardice has three fangs:  
one for my heart,  
one for my skin,  
one for my tongue.

My grandparents taught my parents  
to raise birds.  
How their wings would beat  
against the caged door.

The clouds walk fingers  
over this mountain.  
Yesterday I slept.  
Today I do not.

Where will this next drop of rain fall?  
My heart says this is the most important question.

By day, the fields are not quite green  
and drink the sun copiously.

By night, they are shy girls  
gathering up their skirts to run away.

When it happens, I will be afraid.  
I am not a liar.  
I am courageous.

A grandmother's hair hangs long and grey  
over her back.  
It is a surprise to her sleepy grandson.

With both hands he reaches up  
to kiss each strand.

A small girl painted blue  
for the holiday –

only I know how much she didn't want this.



My brother's mind became trapped inside his body.  
He could not speak to us.  
This was the worst death.

His children swam in the milk-pond.  
I dreamed of becoming a bird.

Mother cut her hair short to avoid my hands.  
I mourn that loss.

Absinthe coats the glass like a tongue.

Along the morning's edge  
I play my memory against your skin.

If we could see the moon  
the lake would be illuminated –

all the fish would shimmer,  
all the mussels glow.

Pink blossoms drink that puddle  
where heavy boots will fall.

She asked me to bind her hands.  
How that whimper  
grew thorns in my throat  
and made the walls disappear.

A love I discarded  
does not come to call.

I can only think of the smooth skin  
of her knees, of her cheek.

My son follows the snake of the train  
with wonder –

he is still fascinated with this world.

What was it my father  
meant to teach me?

The long sweep of solid arm  
through water                      the kick?

There were too many bees this year.  
They stole the summer from us.

Build two boats –  
one to take you down the river  
as far as the place we first touched,

One to take you away.

What should they mean to me –  
these lazy palms  
beating beating beating the air?

Lillies bloom  
against the fence  
and I can only guess at their strength.

The mother has two children  
and a handful of sunflowers.

In the kitchen, she is cooking  
tulips and red meat  
for the men working in the garden.

He is only three  
and swoons under the petals  
falling from the trees.

He asks if he can pick them up from the ground –  
I tell him yes.

The bulldog twists his head at me  
and the clouds whither above.

We are always moving away from something.  
We are always moving towards.

Soldiers line up for the day  
And a wasp buzzes under their feet.

I never understood  
how she smelled like a thunderstorm  
and the dry earth at once.

She brought me angry kisses  
and I took them  
because I wanted them anyway.

I have only a few more moments  
and I can still see the moon in the day sky.

Walk.  
Sleep.  
Want.

We become clear  
only at the end  
when the pond is covered over with leaves.

Bicycling over the wooden bridge  
and the blue herons are laughing  
and the reeds bend sideways  
in the little wind.

Dreams wake us  
to a world of too hot tea  
and cold, dusty feet.

Where is that chime, crime  
against the body I rhymed  
with the bell buried in me?

Her neck bends  
while the sun wishes  
to be closer.