

# In Glorious Terms

Mai Serhan

Poetry

كيفك؟

It's you, +972.

It is heatwave

and power cuts

sunburnt flower

and your mirage

everywhere. There's nothing

to cool me down. I settle

somewhere without my shoes

under a table. Ask for ice

where they don't have.

I slide my plate away with two fingers.

Watch a bee hover over sticky cups.

I push the table with one leg.

Text back: تمام. كيف الجو عندك؟



I tell you: ألم

is an anagram of أمل

and isn't our language

always a homecoming.

You, a homecoming. I love.

I worry in two languages

not knowing. You say:

speaking of أمل

am I seeing you tonight?



It is midnight. We settle

on a qahwa. There's a

street cart. We order

sandwichat كبة.

Cool off with سوبيا

and you tell me  
how you left غزة  
with 11 recipes.  
How before you left  
your mother, your mother  
left them for you  
in a voice note.  
How her voice  
felt like bread.  
I ask you, is she beautiful?  
(because you are)  
and you say, جداً.



I found الله  
last October. I was  
knocked off by grief  
I'm now 10 months  
sober. I found Him,  
small Gazan hands,  
won't touch November.  
Clink of bones in a plastic bag,  
a chill before the winter.  
I waited for the world  
to come forth, for Him  
to prove this wrong,  
for the trees to wrath  
                    وياالله what's this  
big plan You have  
to love the size of trees  
so full of grief, in glorious terms  
because of war.



I watch you undergo erasure  
then I unwatch it. Fade you  
back in. I think of you again  
and again. What is belonging  
without a place to belong?  
I want to be that place,

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this skin of yours so fair  
despite your burnt enclave.  
I want my country. I think of us  
again. Coffees at 2 am  
2 minutes from my house.  
How they bombed your house  
again and again. I fade you back in.  
Tell you about my father.  
Catch a glint of you in deep water.  
I tell you أنا فلسطينية until night  
fades, until day breaks.



You stick to what you know  
Text a rose ويسعد صباح  
You greet so generously  
The siege you leave behind  
you bring me in kinship community.  
Black White Red Green heart emojis  
من يدك When will you feed me  
(because they are your hands)  
I eat everything, just not ضاني  
You stick to what you know,  
make Ouzi. Feed me Gaza, generously.  
Everything with a side of green chili.



I go see my sister.  
We walk the streets of كورية  
though my feet are elsewhere.  
We talk love والقضية  
Me, you, and where it hurts us.  
She says, careful. Hope is  
pain when it's all that's left  
and you are not what I am  
looking for. You are not  
my lost country. Don't.  
And I need to ask you  
next time I see you, what if  
they burn my country

before I find it?  
What if you is all  
that's left?

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Mai Serhan is a Palestinian-Egyptian writer, editor and translator. She is the author of, CAIRO: the undelivered letters, winner of the 2022 Center for Book Arts Poetry Chapbook Award and the forthcoming memoir, I Can Imagine It For Us, a finalist for the Narratively Memoir Prize. Visit [www.maiserhan.com](http://www.maiserhan.com) for more on her work.

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