

Daughters of Islam's Disappeared

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About the Author

The poet Yvonne Green is a British-born Jewess of Boukharian extraction. She read law at the LSE and was called to the Bar in both New York and London. Her pamphlet, *Boukbara* (2007), won The Poetry Business Book & Pamphlet Competition. She has published 4 full-length collections including; *The Assay* (2010), *Honoured* (2015) and *Jam & Jerusalem* (2018). *After Semyon Izrailevich Lipkin* was named as the Poetry Book Society's Translation Choice in 2011 and her *Selected Poems and Translations* was published for Kindle by Smith|Doorstop in 2014. Her work has been translated into Hebrew by Tal Nitzán and published by Am Oved.

Daughters of Islam's Disappeared

We're Egypt's legacy, our mothers liked to dress-up, managed wit in
Several languages, became our children's Nonas, Yayas, Memehs, Baboushkas,
Metzmays, Bubas, Teetas, Bibis, with manicured hands they made konafa,
Baklava, menena, ghorayeba, told stories of picnics au claire de la lune, said,
When asked about King Faroukh eating forty quail in one go, tout comprendre
C'est tout pardonner, they'd fall from the sky in September, exhausted from

Migration, they'd be caught running around, they were so tiny, maiden-maidek,
You would barbecue many at a time, on one skewer, till they were so crunchy, you
Could eat the whole lot, even the bones – our mothers preferred to pepper
Discourse with the possible rather than the probable, the challenge rather than
The inevitable, the exception rather than the rule, mystique rather than matter-of-
Fact, our mothers, ach yarrap, shored up husbands when they had to rebuild their

Lives in middle age, translated new worlds for the parents who had sheltered
Their childhoods, imported for us the sources of their strength, culture, nuance,
Tolerance, identity – zayek ya basha to brothers, ya rokhi ya ooni to children,
Ahlan wa sahlam to the always welcome visitor, the art of the accueil never lost,
We were lucky, you'd hear from those who talked politics, set the bar for luck low,
Or shall we say, made it relative to Europe's horrors, the perpetrator of which

Faroukh, then Nasser admired, matkhafish, you, my mother, might say, if you still
Spoke, instead, at ninety eight, you gaze out of your window on Tel Aviv's Herbert
Samuel street, at the same sea you saw when you grew up on Alexandria's Corniche –
Not come upseck, my New York Nona would have said, ma'alesh, as she served me
Memories of Central Asia's Boukharian Emirate from where our King Solomon-
dispatched men Had established silk routes, while our women and children were

Held hostage to the trade-tax their husbands would pay on their return, we were
Lucky, you'd hear from your father whose parents had fled Russian Central Asia in
1920, the Khan ate in our home, never touched our women, your great-great aunt was
His court poet, it was the Bolsheviks who attacked the Jews, but the Jews are gone

From there too, mothers, grandmothers, your hand-creamed skin, soft on my forearm,
You sigh a lesson, be philosophical not bitter, history outgrew us, always us,

I rasp, alongside factions in the theatre of war, every one of us elided with
Zion, conspiracy, elders of fictions, clichés of cruel cuts, can you imagine the nine
Years after 1948, the creep of Israel-hate, that became Jew-hate, dispossession,
Sequestration, expulsion – escape for both nationals and the stateless
Alike? did all 1956-Egypt's 80,000 Jews go to Israel? my mother was the only one in her
Family to set up home there five decades later, when she and my Berlin-born father

Left England's changing mood, after expulsion her brothers went to Brazil, New York,
France, England, one, refused papers, took his own life in 1963, a brilliant doctor,
welcomed to study or teach medicine at the Sorbonne, Cambridge, Montpellier,
New York but couldn't get leave to remain, couldn't face another round of
Begging for a passport, after the tears, yodad ba khai, ze ha khayim, nobody
Talked about the things that were too hard, but they talked and joked all the

Time about everything else, in English, French, Italian, Greek, Armenian,
Arabic, Spanish, Persian, Boukharian, moved between cultures without being
Defined by them, visited each others places of worship if they wanted to, were
Word perfect in each other's liturgies, yes their friends knew the Shema, could
Quote many sura from the Koran, recite the 'Our Father', sing the hymns, I was
Told again and again, and we learn new languages, accents, ideas, inventions

But never lose our own, spot each other instantly, we children of the disappeared
Egypt memorialised here tonight, the Moussa, Mounir, Wahba, Wassef, Abdulla,
Arwas, Ahad, Nacamuli, Fedida, Gholam, Hayatt, Naggat, Cohen, Meyer,
Bowell, Smouha, Aciman, Lagnado, Sardas, Strauss, Josipovici, Ribacoff
And so many more

