



Shukran



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Embraced. Divorced. The oak waves as the lake and the
stone
dust dust At equal speed into nothing.
Compass point spins is soldered. Keys float beyond
Non beg mercy, it binds beneath our song
The prisoner's hall note's no-song
that droning note we speak.
Our melody is heard.

D r e a m i n g

I *dreamt* your suicide note was scrawled in pencil.

I *dreamt* you were here, burning along next to me.

The burning reached each carbon letter, your voice released
into the night.

I *dreamt* we were happy, burning my love with you.

I *dreamt* it was over, burning into nothing, I quit.

You *dreamt* it too.

Burning together throughout the night, the bag opened into
darkness.

We *dreamt* it together.

Burning away, burning away, burning

The Hammam

“A hammam is like a public bathhouse where Moroccans go at least once a week to cleanse themselves. It’s a social experience for many.” As our guide, María told us this the first time, all six girls looked at each other on the bus and made a face. There was no way were we going to bathe in front of each other. We had been travelling as a group with our university for three weeks already throughout Spain, but, there was no way we were about to get naked in front of each other.

“Are you guys going to the hammam?” Jordyn had asked later in the day as we were leaving a youth center.

“No,” Brittany said, “I have my period, I don’t feel comfortable going with it.”

“Yeah, I don’t know if I wanna go either, I don’t feel good” Ally said, an obvious cop out. Jordyn looked at me hopefully.

“I don’t know guys,” I shrugged, “I think it would be kind of cool. It’s part of their culture, and a part of traveling is about trying new things. C’mon, when are we going to get the chance to do this again?” I knew if one of us said yes, maybe it would change everyone’s mind. More importantly, it had been three days since anyone had properly showered. The homes in Rabat, Morocco

didn't have the showers that we are privileged to in America. One group said that they had to bathe in a bucket and almost broke down in tears about how awful it was. The home I was living in had a faucet in the bathroom, next to the toilet that I washed my hair under after the second day. Our homestay sister never showed us where the real shower was. We didn't know if they had one and we were too shy to ask since hygiene wasn't as important to Moroccans as it was to us.

Our homestay sister, Fatima, told us one day at lunch that the hammam is a great experience for women, especially since many Moroccan women don't get to leave the house often. It was a time and a place for women to get together and share the latest news and gossip or to relax. She said it was very nice and definitely something that we should do. We tried to tell her we weren't sure how comfortable we were with being naked in front of each other. Fatima assured us it was no problem, we could wear a bathing suit, but not to worry because it was custom to be naked in the hammam and therefore not weird for others.

Ally, Chelsea and I had only a few minutes after a group outing through the medina to run into our house and upstairs to get dressed before we had to run back downstairs to collect some buckets and towels. Once we had everything we needed we followed Fatima out the door and through the maze of a neighborhood we lived in and headed towards our meeting spot, the palm tree. Jordyn was the only other girl who was coming with us and we met up with her before we reached our meeting spot. She had the guide with her, a girl about eighteen, who showed us to the hammam and what to do when we were there.

It turned out the hammam we had passed everyday on our way to the meeting point was the one that we were going to. We walked single file through the door and, our guide said something in Arabic to the woman at the counter, a greeting perhaps. She gave us each a scrub glove, shampoo and body wash. We followed our guide through another door that had a sign that hung above the doorframe with the picture of a lady, like the ones you would find outside a restroom. This room was like a locker room, only there were no lockers. This was called the changing room. We ducked

under a curtain that provided more privacy if the first door happened to be open and a lady walked by not dressed. The room was warm and the air was thick and steamy like a pool room. There were benches around the room and hooks to hang belongings on. We found a spot to put our stuff behind a half wall where we took off our shoes, reluctantly, not knowing what crawled on the floor and we took off our clothes, keeping our bathing suits on. I could see down the short hallway that lead to another room where there were a few other women. I could also see that there was another room on the other side of the first room I was looking into. There were two different rooms because one was a hot room and one was a cool room.

I saw a large woman walk by with nothing but something that vaguely resembled some kind of bathing suit bottom on her lower half, although it was hard to see because she was quite hefty. Her breasts hung large and sagged down to her waist, her sides engulfed her lower half. Embarrassed, I looked away and the three American girls grabbed their buckets and we followed our guide into the hot room.

Our guide instructed us to fill our buckets at the spigot, so we did as two Moroccan women stared at us while they sat on small step stools completely naked. Tourists don't often visit public hammams, so we were quite a sight to see for them. We avoided eye contact and once the large buckets were filled we struggled to take them to a corner on the other side of the room where our guide was sitting. She was completely topless and sat cross-legged on the floor. I tucked my legs under me, afraid whatever bacteria that crawled over the floor would find their way not only to my bare feet, but to my butt as well. I wasn't sure how clean this place was, but I guessed it was dirtier than pool locker rooms or saunas. We had two large buckets and everyone had their own smaller bucket for taking water and pouring it on ourselves. Our guide introduced us to henna. I had always thought that was strictly for henna tattoos, but you are able to use it as a body wash as well. I held the brown jelly in my hand and used my scrubbing glove to spread it over my arms, unsure of whether or not I liked the smell. It wasn't fruity like most body washes I was used to, but rather

more herbal and grassy.

The large woman I had seen before walked into the room and came over to us. She was a hammam attendant. She and our guide exchanged some words in Arabic and our guide translated and asked if any of us would like to pay fifty dirham, about five U.S. dollars, to be scrubbed down by this woman. Ally was the first one to volunteer, but I don't think she understood what it meant. I don't think *I* fully knew what it meant. I was happy bathing myself in the hammam and experiencing the culture this way. Having a large topless stranger with sagging breasts scrub me down seemed a little too much for me. The woman took Ally over to the opposite corner from us and sat her down on a thin blue mat that was just barely longer than her torso, and had Ally take off her top. Not wanting to stare, I turned my back and struggled with shampooing myself and dumping water onto my head trying not to get soapy water in my eyes the way my mother used to do when I was a child. Only doing it myself wasn't as enjoyable.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see that the woman had made Ally lay down and was leaning over her, scrubbing roughly, Ally's body swayed back and forth as the woman scrubbed. Ally looked tense and I felt sorry for her. I don't think she fully understood what was meant when the woman asked if she wanted to do it. When she was done the woman pointed to the floor and Ally's legs at the dead skin. It was gross. Then the woman roughly dumped the bucket of water on Ally, washing away the dead skin. It seemed abrupt, but necessary. A chill ran down my spine as I thought about all the dead skin that was probably on this floor.

Chelsea was the next to be washed, then Jordyn and then myself. The biggest issue I had with the hammam was having someone scrub me down, but everyone else did it, and I went to the hammam in the first place to experience the culture so I figured I might as well. When was I going to do this again anyway? I said yes before I could change my mind.

The woman took me over and motioned for me to take off my bathing suit top, I was grateful my hair was long enough to cover my small white breasts.

The woman took my exfoliating glove, even though I thought I

already did a good job of doing it myself and she went to town, first on my arm, then my chest. She instructed me to lay down and moved my hair away from my body. I stiffened as this very large woman moved the glove across my chest. I don't like being topless, much less in front of a woman I didn't know, in a place I wasn't completely comfortable with. Could she tell I was tense? I stared up at the ceiling waiting for it to be over. I sucked in my belly uncomfortably as she scrubbed over my breasts, afraid it would hurt and she would scrub them right off. She was gentle there, rougher at my collarbone. She lifted up my arm and scrubbed my underarm, I smiled and tried not to squirm. I was ticklish. I think I saw a hint of a smile across her stern face. Were Moroccan women ticklish too? Did they giggle when their under arms were scrubbed? Then she leaned over me and scrubbed my left arm, her breast hanging inches away from my ribcage. I tensed again, I didn't want it to touch me. Then she washed my legs, I stiffened when she grabbed my bottoms and pulled them a little out of the way. How far was she going to pull them? I didn't want her scrubbing my crotch, that was a little too personal for me. She didn't though and once I realized that I relaxed and she had moved down my thighs, over my knees and down to my shins and then my feet where my toes curled because I was ticklish there too.

She motioned for me to sit up and look at the dead skin down at my legs, the way she did with Ally and I was disgusted. The skin on my legs looked a lot like the skin I peel off my back after a bad sunburn. I flashed a surprised look at the woman, hoping she understood that I was not only disgusted by the dead skin, but impressed with her work.

Then she motioned for me to roll over and I did, the mat cool against my bare stomach. At least my breasts were covered now. The woman went to town on my back and I nearly fell asleep. She moved down my back and towards my butt, moving my bottoms slightly like she did before, then she did the backside of my legs and went down to my feet again, really scrubbing at the heels. My toes curled again. She dumped water over me, washing away the dead skin. Then she had me sit up and she moved my hair and scrubbed my neck, front and back. Suddenly sitting upright next to

her, I felt like a small child being washed by its mother.

She threw more water on me with the small bucket and to finish it off she took what water was left in the large bucket and dumped it over my head.

I threw my now re-soaked hair back over my head, since it fell in my face and said thank you, nodded and smiled. I don't know if she understood the English phrase thank you, but I figured the smile and the nod was pretty universal. The other girls had disappeared, except for our guide, into the changing room to gather their belongings and dirham for the woman. I gathered my things from the bucket and dumped out the rest of the water. It was nearly seven; the hammam was closing, it was time to go. I fixed my hair to fall over my breasts as I walked out to meet the other girls in the changing room who were getting dressed.

“What'd you think?” Jordyn asked.

“It was actually really cool,” I said, satisfied that I'd done it.

“Oh my God I know! That was amazing!” Ally echoed. She found the large woman and gave her her dirham. Once we toweled off and put on our dry underwear we followed our guide back to the house. She knew Fatima and knew exactly where we lived, which was good because we had no idea how to get back to the house and had no way of contacting anyone in the house to come and pick us up. It turned out our guide and Fatima were very good friends.

The night was cool and although we wore flip-flops on the dirt streets where chickens and cats frolicked during the day, I'm sure rats by night, I felt like we glowed. I could not get over how clean I felt. After three days of not properly showering, I finally felt like I took my first shower in a month. I had never felt so clean before. We raved about it on our way back to our home, our guide talking to us about how great and common the hammam was for women and men to go to. She said she likes to go once a week or maybe twice a month, that it's a nice time and a relaxing time. This did not

mean that she only bathed at these times, she had a shower at her home too, but the hammam is a cultural tradition.

When we got home we were offered dessert and we talked more about the hammam with Fatima. The house was quiet because everyone was napping. It was customary to take a nap after the breaking of the fast dinner and before dessert. We politely said no thank you for dessert and went to our room and went to bed. We had a long day ahead of us again tomorrow. We couldn't wait to get on the bus and tell everybody about the hammam and what they all missed.

The Color Red

Red, the color of my wrists
the color of my face.
I could feel the bruises already.

small and red
soon to be black and blue

Red, the color of his eyes.
An animal before me he stands,
there but not completely.
His mind off somewhere else
wild with anger

Red, the color of the blood
splattered on the floor.

Red, the color of the lights
flashing through the window.
The men in uniform pile in.

Red is the color I see
e v e r y w h e r e .

It wasn't my fault.

It was an accident.

It was an accident.

*The storm rages on
no signs of mercy
destroying everything*

there's no stopping it

until it finishes what it started.

It was an accident.

Forever

Falling into the earth, the world
of green, of light as the lake
shallows to a stone, shallows itself.

We love into the sun.

At the galaxy's core

in this grave

the lock turned.

Forever, ringing

Whose sound is nothing.

 Such words.



K.C. Schweizer

From Fairfield, Connecticut, K.C. came to Susquehanna University to pursue a degree in creative writing. She later picked up a second major in editing & publishing and minors in Spanish and photography. She was an active member in Alpha Phi Omega and rode on the equestrian team during her time at SU. After graduation she hopes to work at a publishing house in New York City. *The Hammam* was a personal essay written after her GO short trip to Spain, which included a week in Morocco. If there were one thing that K.C. would say about her experiences and years at SU, she would say, *shukran, thank you.*

