

A Toll, Ya

Phillip Louie

A toll, ya: for the coin, for the voice, for the bone.
We pawned away the Shah and minted the prayer-law.
You named moharebeh; but I named her, my home.

She hoisted her sun-white shawl, a bolt of one clean tone:
no lion or sword—nor the tulip-script: “Allāh.”
A toll, ya: for the coin, for the voice, for the bone.

Her brilliant bolt sang in hymns. Not alone
We chorused within—then they thundered shells as law.
You named moharebeh; but I named her, my home.

I found her under that shawl; her eyes stole the tone
of the morgue. I clung to her corpse—I went raw.
A toll, ya—for the coin, for the voice, for the bone.

The blood of my blood runs dry. Her shawl alone
remains; but her tulip-dye still runs—I wash wash wash.
You named her moharebeh; I named her—my home.

The flesh of my flesh lies buried. Here I groan
by her grave on the road. Will you tell me her flaw—
Ayatollah? Do you come to dig up my home?
She’s mine, not yours—my Rubina—the bone of my bone.

