

THE PERSIAN PHOENIX/SIMURGH RISING

POETRY

Al Salehi

We are a new generation: a sisterhood of Women
and Men, charging tall,
fiercely fighting for one and for all—
with locks, blowing bravely in the wind.

You may stumble into us: abiding—
coordinated and collected,
but do say your
prayers, *tyrants*.

For while you're preoccupied preaching,
our ship escapes, breaching
its glass bottle, and shedding its white flag,
as our message methodically multiplies:

"No longer invisible,
we are indivisible.
With no rights left to lose,
and no rials left to redeem—

a nonconforming current, unnerves the water's stillness, as a ceaseless
storm swirls without surrender within, an ever-countering mind.

A colliding kismet's set fearlessly forging forward into the fray,
for freedom—in this life, or the next.

Smoldering beneath green, white, and red parchment,
we now soar, ballooning bare-knuckled,
unequivocally charting a course, correction, in the dark
blue mist, toward equality."

You might *picture* us
as a manageable threat,
but misdirection
can be a two-way street.

We hide and seek—a sinusoidal wave, resounding in a resurgent resistance,
cresting into an unwavering force of nature,
that cannot be diverted,
nor outrun.

Together, we tether the tumultuous tides that twirl into a turbulent tsunami.
Hand in hand, we weave the wayward winds that intertwine inside a tornado.
United we emerge: a merging momentum of moving magma wedged within
the Earth;
hard-pressed for eruption.

Expatriates, ex-dreamers, ex-mothers and fathers, stirred by a sliver of
hope, reignite
from a slow burn, rising upon smokey embers of ash from reign,
to ultimately unveil the end
of injustice and pain.

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Free, free-er,
—soon—to Be;
Women \ Life / Freedom:
Zan \ Zendegi / Azadi.

** Months prior to the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979, one U.S. dollar bought 70 Iranian rials. A few months ago the rial hit an all-time low, on the unofficial market, where one dollar bought 601,500 rials. The gradual spiraling of hyperinflation, rising costs, and high unemployment, led to mass uprisings after the September 16, 2022, killing of Mahsa Amini, a young Kurdish-Iranian woman who died from brain injury while in police custody for improper hijab in Tehran. This prompted “Zan, Zendegi, Azadi” to become the battle cry of a movement against state oppression in Iran and beyond. The slogan was first popularized during International Women’s Day marches across Turkey on March 8, 2006, chanted primarily by Kurdish women as, “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi,” meaning, “Women, Life, Freedom.”*

*** Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh (Book of Kings) c. 977-1010 CE, is regarded as one of the greatest works of world literature and the national epic of Iran. It is the longest poem ever written by a single author. One of its more famous accounts tells the story of the Simurgh. It is a female mammalian bird that watched the world burn three times over, having lived through infinite time. When she sees the Sun rage against all things, it waits for the tree on which she sits to catch on fire and allows itself to be burned with the tree. From the ashes of the tree, she is reborn.*