



Excerpt: The Act of Writing by Mona Dash

I imagine you come here with expectations. You want to hear tales, of the sari, of the mango, of cow hooves kicking up a dry dust you will want to wipe off with a scented handkerchief. You want to hear of lavender, of turmeric, of jasmine soothing the hot summer evening in a distant tropical country. You expect to be told stories of a certain woman, a certain man in a certain way. You want to feel, but nothing beyond the ordinary, nothing you cannot stomach along with a thick steak, the knife a tad bloody from the rare meat.

Prepare then to be annoyed. Prepare to shake your heads at the lack of clichés. Prepare to throw away the book even. Prepare to be angry that anyone can write these stories nowadays, and no longer is it the right of the powerful, the strong, the erudite. That anyone can now take up a pen, a laptop and float words on the page, dipping into history and geography and creating; creating that which needn't have been, or having taken form deserved to be demolished.

The stories I want to write may be nothing you expect, or may be everything you desire. I don't know yet you see. I can write about the place I am from, the shores I arrived at, the people I met. I can write about the accidents, the tragedies, the way people lost breath when they didn't expect to, or were maimed and silenced. The blood which flowed when people attacked others, their homes, their bodies. Inspired by the books on war, I can, for example, write about gas chambers or the site where a nuclear bomb ripped the soil and its heart, or through the eyes of a little child whose parents kissed, and were shot before him. Except that it has been done before, in ways fourscore and one.

But why, I can fly across continents and write about modern wars, the one where planes drove into tall, proud towers, the one which is continuing everyday as delusional youth wield axes and knives or guns or strapping explosives on, aspire to explode and achieve heavendom, annihilating innocent people. Moved by the video of the civil war and watching neighbours bomb the Stari Most, I can explore strife in stranger countries. I can write about the betrayal and naivety which led to foreign countries ruling my own, but that too has been done; the red and blue flag has been replaced a million times by the tricolor and evil has always been shown to be white.

There is so much to write.

But yes all that has been written before and I want to write something new, infinitely precious. So let me do this instead, write some simple tales.