

[1] *

I knew it was there all along but I didn't know what it was, or why my dad didn't pray on this particular rug anymore until I asked him one day.

It turned out, this was her place of refuge. Her sanctuary.

When I saw the wear, the marks... for me—this is what the prayer is about: touching the earth, literally—grounding. A reminder.

I am casting objects to capture their magic—Barakah [in the Quran it's used to describe something that has spiritual energy, something holy; I use this word for objects that are magical to me]. They are fragile, they are ephemeral, they can break—I want to hold onto them forever. This rug traces my family history, my lineage, my culture. I want to hold on to it the best I can.

I am stretching it to make it longer, as long as a life. I want it to reach up all the way to heavens. I am tracing the shape, worn out by her body, and I am lifting up all that wear. I turned it into columns, to give it presence, weight. To be able to circumnavigate them, like towers, islands. I turned it into a mirror, twice; its infinite space and infinite depth. A mirror that a rock can shatter, but instead it is supporting it.

I never met her but it tells me so much about who she was.

I went back home last year. I coped but I didn't, you know. She had eight children. I can't even imagine. And the wars she lived through... hardship. I know what my parents have saved me from.

When my arms were hurting, I asked my dad to massage them, to rub in the medicine, and then he told me. I have her hands and I have her pain.

[2]

I have been through a lot. We have been through a lot. I am worn out.

I have been around for years, as you might remember. But you didn't know why I was just sitting there on your dad's bedside table. Resting, retired. Waiting for you to look at me, to find me out.

Since she was very young—we were together. She just left her family home, starting her own. I was a part of her new life, her long life: labour, hardship, wars.

Every day, five times a day, she returned—with her thoughts, her cares, concerns and hope.

Her body met my body again and again.

I couldn't always know what happened in the time that passed in-between, but I collected every touch of her hands in my threads—all the repetitions. The tears that ran down her face—I tried to hold on to them. Where she would place her knees, the wear went deep, became longer than my body could contain, ran into the earth with the words of her prayer.

Every touch, every gesture is here—compressed; you and I, we remember it. You have her hands and you have her love.

* While both parts of this text draw from my conversations with the artist Lara Chamas held in her studio, I have taken the liberty to paraphrase her (in the first part), and to construct a fictional account narrated by an inanimate object (in the second part). I deeply thank Lara for her openness and generosity in sharing her practice and family history with me.

- Olga Bennett