



Water & Salt

POETRY BY

Lena Khalaf Tuffaha

The poems in this stunning debut travel across borders between cultures and languages, between the present and the living past. These poems alternately rage, laugh, celebrate and grieve, singing in the voices of people ravaged by cycles of war and news coverage and inviting the reader to see the human lives lived beyond the headlines.

ADVANCE PRAISE

“Aside from wheat, essential ingredients for making bread are water and salt. And in Lena Tuffaha’s luminous poems, she provides the necessary words to feed our humanity. The poems in *Water & Salt* are fearless and frank. They speak of a place where a phone call announces doom and where “portraits find their frames.” But always, despite the violence and war, in the music of Tuffaha’s poetry there is a clear summons, beckoning us to join in the feast of her language. These are poems that rise, surge, and stir us.”

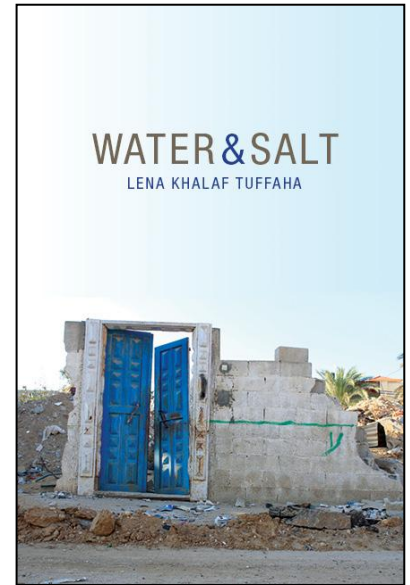
—Oliver de La Paz, author of *Requiem for the Orchard*

“Arab-American poet Lena Khalaf Tuffaha’s poems are both mirror and zaatar, sharing a clear-eyed picture of our sometimes-brutal world—as in the acid clarity of her ‘Running Orders’—and also feeding us from the harvest of possibility: “the song of zaatar simmering / in its native oil rises up / and time evaporates.’ Her auspicious debut *Water & Salt*, named after the primal ingredients for slaking our thirst and satisfying our tongues, carries with it the aching wisdom of immigrants and mothers, whose lives are fraught with departure and carved by longing. Yet she turns the ominous language of border control into the tender music of trochaic hexameter: ‘You will need to state the reason for your visit,’ and encourages us travelers that ‘the story / is still being written and / our fractures aren’t done setting.’”

—Philip Metres, author of *A Concordance of Leaves*,
winner of the Arab American Book Award.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lena Khalaf Tuffaha is an American poet of Palestinian, Jordanian and Syrian heritage. Her poems have been published in American and International journals including *Blackbird*, *The Boiler*, *Borderlands Texas Review*, *The Indianola Review*, *James Franco Review*, *The Lake for Poetry*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Mizna*, *The Ofi Press Mexico*, *Sukoon*, and the *Taos Journal of International Poetry and Art*. Several of her poems have been nominated for Pushcart Prizes: “Immigrant” in 2015 and “Middle Village” and “Ruin” in 2016. She is an MFA candidate at the Rainier Writing Workshop at Pacific Lutheran University. She lives in Redmond, Washington, with her family.



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FROM WATER & SALT

Water & Salt

Behind the walls of your jails we wait
heartbeats audible now, muffled thuds
above the current of blood running thin
indigo rivulets pulsing loud beneath parchment skin
chafing and coarse like stone walls that surround us.

We lie side to side,
we hunger for what eating cannot feed,

we carve out a sanctuary
that no beating can tear down,
no interrogation room scars can pierce

this is our achewe decide
how we live and if we die
we decidewho gives and who takes away

we claim the freedom

to turn stone into sunlight streaming through your jails
to sip water and salt like sacrament

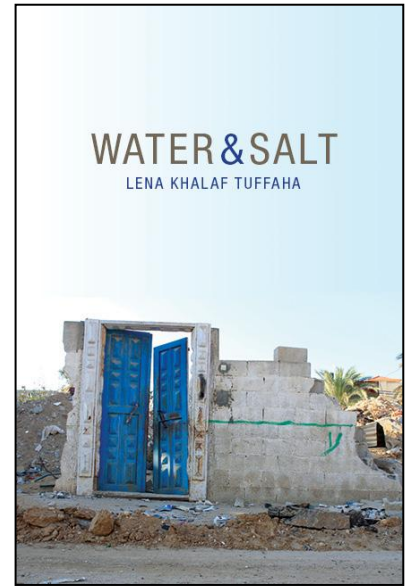
freedom

to own our bodies and the land beneath them
to breathe the air on both sides of the wall

freedom

to wait and wait
for your checkpoints and your watchtowers
to be subsumed in a crashing wave

of water and salt
you never saw it coming, this cleansing,
how we have become this ocean.



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