paper ashes
I have too many things to think about.
There is too much to write.
Sometimes I feel people are like ashes.
If the wind blows hard they will disappear.
Sometimes I feel home is like ashes.
If the wind blows hard it will disappear.
There is a girl who has a dream,
like every other human in the world.
She heard that one day the dream will come
true like it did in Rapunzel!
For her…maybe?
She wants to realize her dream.
The girl is me. I am (      ).
Life is a flower…without water it will die.

In the places I’ve seen, the idea of peace exists, but never happens. This is the darkness.
There are too many things in my mind.
I don’t know how to start or how to describe…
It was like tea in Syria
Between two cups of tea, one cup with sugar, one cup bitter.
A rope between the two cups, walkers in between.
Maybe one day the wind will blow and throw them either way.
Like it does everywhere in the world.
From where should I start...?
...I will start in the outskirts and move toward the heart, Damascus.
Syria (still recognized as Bilad al-Sham, the province which also includes Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine) is beautiful. Mountains surround Syria, Qasioun the most famous. The summit is always covered in snow, in winter and even when summer is all around, in all season it is the same. People like it and come from all over the world to Syria to see this mountain.

Far from Damascus, beautiful hotels, and no vacancy. A meeting place for all the different flowers of the world.

The wind can move people, but cannot move Qasioun.
Ancient buildings of the past from the oldest flowers are still alive.
They didn’t leave their souls, they just left their functions which are very important to us.
For us they are still alive in their ruins.
If you ask me where I’m from?
I have too much to write.
Next year, my book will be completely different.
I want to be a police officer for many reasons I can't explain now.
That is my dream as Rapunzel.
People are flowers at birth.

They walked on the bridge. They were strong. What I mean by that is that they were kind, they respected each other.

They are the sweet tea.
All of these old, living ruins are in different parts of Syria. These historic places host tourists from all over the world.

The villages are rainbows of color and the land is blanketed in green. The sky is full of blue. The people wear blue and green eyes to match the land and sky. And people wear brown and black eyes to match the attractive wood and the sparkling midnight.

There are many sweet and bitter female flowers who dress covered from the top of the body to the bottom. The colors of their dresses mirror the rainbow villages. And some dress in a beautiful black color, the color of the darkness of night.

There are other types of villages there with different cultures, beliefs and dress. Male flowers who dress with the basic dress, not traditional, because they don’t have to.
People are born as flowers.
People begin their lives as flowers at birth.
But as they grow, I feel them, I see them,
walking on an enormous bridge over a salty sea.
Some flowers walk safely, bearing the strong
wind. They reach the other side and become
kind, admirable flowers…the sweet tea.

The other flowers on the bridge can’t and
won’t bear the fierce wind of life. They fall and
drown in the salty sea and become the bitter tea.
Some by choice, some by chance.
This happens in all of the world.
I am going to fly further in towards the heart and tell about the cities, which are like smaller versions of the states in this garden. The villages in Damascus, Halab, Idlib, and more. Some of them are amazing. The tourists come from afar to see the Syrian beauty and eat traditional food.
Eight rivers run across the land and a man-made lake sits still. Some rivers are happy in Syria and some run into other lands. The lake is called ‘The Lion’ for the last name of the presidential family.
I was living in an illusion.
I was looking to the end of a failed future from afar...
I was looking at a wrinkled life like the wrinkles of the skin.
I did not see the beauty of the world.
I was trying to wake up but I couldn't.
I smiled for them but the smile wasn't from my scuffed-up heart.
I did not go to the home of love, but a world of worries...
I was trying to paint a smile on my lips... but the color of the smile was difficult to find.
I called to love but no response, so I decided to be silent.
I decided to be silent.
Going to wake up and never again be silent for my future dreams.
What does it mean to be weak?
To die while you’re alive.

Now I hear about Damascus in the news and on Utube (the bad news coming).
Here I will stop flying.
I’ve reached the heart.
It is Damascus, the capital of Syria.
I start walking in the heart.
I walked in the streets amongst many kinds of beautiful flowers, where there was bitter and sweet tea. I saw that all the people looked different and dressed in different ways.
I walked a new street after a long flight, Shareh al-Hamrah (Red Street).
I saw the red roses and smelled the bitter and sweet tea.
The stores were amazing to me.
More green land, more blue sky.
Flowers with rosy lips and cheeks.
This is the street for full pockets or a dream of having one.
Hearing about the Red Street is surprising.
So many cars, impossible to drive.
Imagining...Red roses on the street sides, red covers on the shops, kinda red-bright like a cartoon.
Red Street makes you fall in love at first sight as if you’ve been blind up until then.
And there is a walker on the middle of the rope.

And there is bad news coming on the rope.
That was the last thing I saw in Damascus
Al-saida Zainab street is a small city, like Columbia heights

I lost my dream there.
Sometimes laughing doesn't describe the happiness inside me but the opposite.

Deep inside me is where you read the paper ashes
(my heart told me to be different
because life said I gotta move on...
Forget about the past
And follow the pink future.
You won't lose...
Al-Saida Zainab Street

Now that we’re in the heart, let’s move to a chamber.
Petals are like fingers...different but part of the same hand.
Some laughing and some suffering.
Some begging, some spending. There were poor and rich flowers walking in the street...
Beggars from another street wait outside the door while others feast inside.
A few children, angels, pleading for money while spenders have their fun.
Some childhoods are magical and some are disappointing.
This is the street for full pockets or a dream of having one.
Open air market place, bazaar of Hamidia. Suc-Al-Hamidia.
Different flowers are visiting from different grounds
to see and buy and taste the essence of the culture.
It’s amazing for some flowers, but not for others.
It’s crowded.
Laughter is both happiness and sadness.
Life is both black and white.

Let’s walk inside…
The most significant area.
Burial place of Prophet Mohamed’s daughter.
Al-Saida Zainab, a chamber of Damascus
Just like her sister, Al-Saida Rokaya.
Packed with walkers, both cold and hot seasons.
Walking in the steamy hot, like melting ice
Or in air as cold as snow.
Flowers from different grounds, loving the heart.
Flowers gave up dreams yet some still sit in their hearts.
A wonder…does everybody have a dream?
Some depend on others and some work to reach theirs.
And some…a question mark.
There is no shame in falling down.
The shame is in not being able to rise up again.
The wounds and sadness of the past are not the end of the world.
Because there is the future.

Doors closed in front of you, look again.
There must be an open door right in front of your face.
Life is nothing but paper ashes.
You will bear it.
And if you are stunned by the winds of winter.
Be patient.
It is very difficult to forget the past...
Look and you will see.
People bear their joys and sorrows.

People mourn a lost soccer match. The game is very important, as if it's the world.

And a lost family?

People live with comfort and with fatigue. Some have lost homes because of the Arab wind. Some have been inspired by the Arab wind. And some have found another beautiful garden.
I am a small leaf.
A big, unpeaceful Middle Eastern wind blew me away.
It was my choice.
It took me to another garden with lots of different kinds of flowers.
What should we write about today?
Walking into the heart of my
deep dreams.

My night dreams to spread the roses in the
streets past.
.... to paint color of the real smile on my rosey
soft lips

What color is it?

To change an old past to a new future.

But I woke up the shiny morning after that dark
night to find the sea can't change its course, and
I can't change the course of my life.
After all the dreams, I woke up hanging on a long necklace of this present day and found the wisdom in the deepest part of my soul. There I found all the humans had a sad gray and a happy pink knots from the past just like me!

I found my smile and self in the middle of a lovely family, in a new home country.
Make your lips up with pink and flowers will emerge.
Remember this.
When the wind comes it will blow, hold the ground. Don’t wait for the wind.
Life is beautiful.
But you must look.
A PROJECT BY
Monica Haller

BOOK BY
Hilwah Sabah Raji Alrufaie

TEXT
Hilwah Sabah Raji Alrufaie

EDITING
Jennifer Natter
Monica Haller
Anna Stadnick

TEMPLATE DESIGN
Matthew Rezac
Monica Haller

SOFTWARE DESIGN
Mark Fox

PRINTING
Lulu.com

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We made this book for listening. Please accept our invitation. We made this book for deployment. Please pass it along and invite someone else to listen.

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Monica Haller

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I'm Hilwah, and I came from the old country of Tigris and Euphrates (Iraq). I don’t directly write about Iraq because it would be such a sad and long story. So I talk about Syria, where I lived for a few years. I use nonfiction poems in my book to talk about how life was, how I see it and how I dream it. I now live in the United States, which I love. It is my home, too. It is the new garden where I’ve met many beautiful flowers (people) who have helped me along the way.

If you would like to ask me about my book you can contact me at veteransbookproject@gmail.com