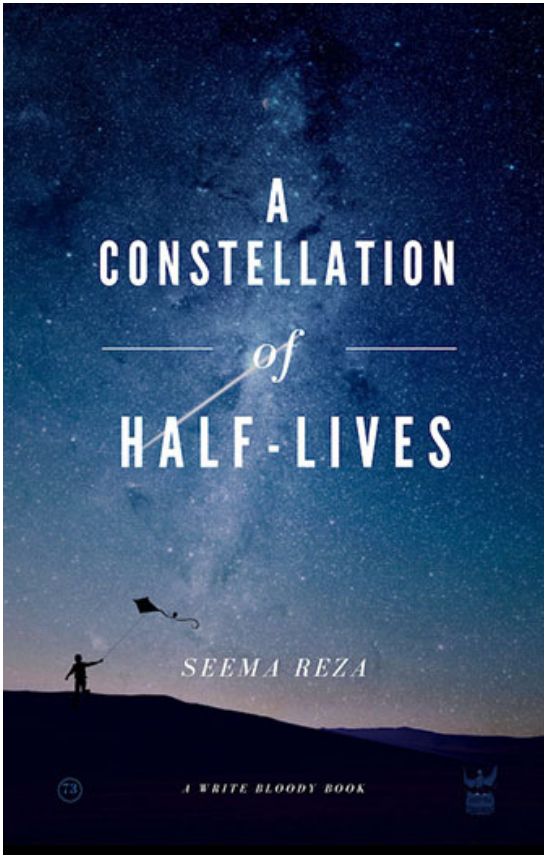


★ FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ★

# A CONSTELLATION OF HALF-LIVES

## POEMS BY SEEMA REZA

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"ONE OF THE  
MOST ASTOUNDING  
COLLECTIONS I'VE READ."

Brendan Constantine  
*Dementia, My Darling*

"THESE POEMS EXALT THE  
COMPLICATED BEAUTY OF  
HUMANNESS."

Jeanann Verlee  
*Prey*

*A Constellation of Half-Lives* is a collection of poems that attempt to reconcile the crisis of living on a collapsing planet with the unreasonable joy of loving and the pleasure of being alive.

With careful precision and an exquisite eye for detail, poet Seema Reza examines what it means to be a mother, a daughter, and an American in a time of war. Through second-person poems she questions whether the beauty of this world outweighs its fragility and risk.

April 8, 2019

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**Seema Reza** is the author of *A Constellation of Half-Lives* and *When the World Breaks Open*. Based outside of Washington, DC, she is Executive Director of Community Building Art Works, featured in the HBO Documentary *We Are Not Done Yet*. She coordinates a unique multi-hospital arts program that encourages the use of the arts as a tool for narration, self-care and socialization among a population struggling with emotional and physical injuries. Her writing has appeared in print and online in *Entropy*, *The Feminist Wire*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *The Offing*, *Full Grown People*, and *The Nervous Breakdown* among others, and has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She has performed across the country at universities, theaters, festivals, bookstores, conferences, and one mattress shop.

## Q&A WITH POET SEEMA REZA

### **Q. Tell us how *A Constellation of Half-Lives* evolved.**

The project began a cycle of poems addressing an imagined (though not quite fictional) woman named Khadija, a mother living directly in the path of the destruction and environmental contamination of the Global War on Terror. Working with American veterans who are deployed to places where people look like me and my sons, I can't help but think of how easy it would be for me to have a different role in the war, just one twist of fate, you know? As I wrote, it became a series of second-person poems exploring the uneven distribution of grace. There are letters to other American civilians, to my sons, to veterans, to my sisters and mother, to people I have hurt and to people who have hurt me, and to the reflection of myself I find whenever I look closely at other.

### **Q. You reference your Muslim upbringing a bit, and your decision (regret, maybe?) to not raise your own children in that tradition. Can you talk about that?**

Culturally I'm Muslim, and most of my family is quite practicing. The guilt of not practicing the way I was raised never fully dissipated. Between the ages of 15 and 30 or so, I didn't



consider myself Muslim at all. In these poems I'm acknowledging it as part of my identity, which feels a little scary. I feel like someone is going to stand up and point out that I'm a fraud and a terrible daughter. And maybe there's something akin to regret or at least uncertainty about not really giving my children the tradition of religion—theirs to accept or reject, but at least the option.

**Q. In the series of sonnets, "Reckoning with Impermanence" you weave together the experience of motherhood and daughterhood and cover this expanse of experience. How did that poem come to be?**

My older son and I took a road trip up the coast of California when he turned sixteen, and it was one of those experiences that was so visually and emotionally beautiful that it also devastated me. So I'd been thinking about why extreme beauty and joy are so so sad, and how that's something that becomes stronger as life progresses. As these poems were arriving, my older son was beginning the process of stepping away from me into his own life, which is the hope and point of parenting—to deliver your children safely into adulthood, but it's so complicated. You want them to be better parented than you were, but you know that your parents wanted that for you too. And everyone kind of fails. We just have to figure out how to become okay with who we have become.

**Q. You're known for your other work with poetry; teaching in military hospitals, and of course, the beautiful HBO documentary *We Are Not Done Yet* which follows a group of military service members and veterans through the process of writing a poem. How does that work inform your writing?**

I learn a lot from teaching. The questions we ask together in writing workshops feed me personally and creatively. But as a facilitator, you can't bend to your own emotions—you have to be there for your participants. When I'm writing, I don't have to be anything for anyone. I don't filter out my worst instincts, my messiest thoughts and parts. I can center my own perspective, my own discovery. It's a place where I'm free to take up as much space as I want, which in turn fuels my ability to hold space for other people.

**[More about \*We Are Not Done Yet\* \(link\)](#)**



**"SEEMA REZA IS AN INCANDESCENT ORACLE, FIGHTER, WRITER, AND I CANNOT OVERSTATE THE IMPORTANCE OF HER SHINING POEMS."**

Susanna Sonnenberg, *She Matters: A Life in Friendships*

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