

# Kamal (from "Echoes: Five Men Speak")

by Brent Robison

*fatherless boys stagger and stumble the concrete prairies of buried America*

*we sulking pack dogs, rabid crack hogs  
we wounded and vicious and shy and sad  
gonna do all bad, fuck you dad  
cut ourselves with razors under the sunday school sky  
hide when we cry  
we orphan child war-buddy boys  
for us nobody but us to trust in the busted midnight  
just home on this suburb curb  
nothing here but to be here, be fear, big wow in the now  
and still I love you and I never lie  
why ask why, dude the world she die*

And so on and so on. Forget it, I'm sick of it. That's one of my first poems, and if you don't like it, fuck you. Ha. Hoo-ee!

No, sorry, I don't really mean that, it's just a habit I seem to have developed. Blah blah blah blah. Sometimes I just want myself to shut up. Silence is golden, I've heard. Now, that's some sort of illiterate non-sequitur, right?—silence heard, et cetera—for which my professors should be sued for incompetence. Yeah! But sometimes I really wanna be silent, and these days I even wanna be invisible, but I can't be either. My gurus are Dylan and Rumi; my mission is talk. I spout and bubble, I foam at the mouth.

Hoo-ah! I love these open mikes, I get a chance to pour it out, this... whatever it is, this passion, all this love from I'll never know where, and then, and then, sometimes, too much hate. Everything's like all zowie!—splashing scarlet and purple, you know, no beige, it just ain't in me. And see, look, I can't hold still. And if I didn't buzz

my hair, it would explode from my head like a zillion baby snakes bursting an egg. Pow!

Hey, you and me, we're a lost generation, you know it and I know it. I'm twenty-three, holes in my clothes, didn't shave this week, hardly ever wear shoes, see—naked feet! But, but, ma'ams and sirs, I am shockingly well-educated—four years in a small but prestigious mid-western college known far and wide for its oh-so liberal Weltanschauung. Pfffft.

Okay, here we go, another poem. Let's see, let's see...

Nah. Not tonight, I just wanna talk. As you heard the boss man say, my name is Kamal—Kamal Khouri, pleased to meetcha. I was born in Beirut, yes, that Beirut, the city once known as the Paris of the desert, but of course as soon as I was born they started bombing it to shit. Not that I believe it's really a cause and effect situation, you know, but it's a legacy I carry.

But I'm as American as apple pie, I really am. Grew up in the Cabrini projects of Chicago; what's more American than that? Escaped with Mom to the middle class, lucky me. So what the fuck is up? Do I need broken bones? I'm not the one who knocked down your precious money towers! There I am just minding my own business, and then it's like, hey towel-head, hey camel-jockey, hey sand-nigger, we're gonna call you Al—Al Qaeda. And my buddy Josh says ignore the fuckin' rednecks, but my mouth has a mind of its own, blah blah blah, and then it's wham, bam, boom, like this, like that, baseball bat, and when I got out of the hospital, that's when I received my calling. I was called by Allah to be a wandering poet, to be a prophet reviled in his own land while the Great Satan sits on the throne. Thus am I here before you.

Hoo-ee! One toke over the line, sweet Jesus. The boss man is giving me the motion, time's up he says, but hold on, hold on, I gotta do something. See my boom box here? This shiny little disc has given me my sweet background groove for long enough now, it's time to open up the vacuum principle, share the wealth. From God to the sidewalk hawker to me, and now to you. Goodbye, my musical friend. Here ya go out there, a frisbee from heaven!

So dude, it's yours now—what's your name? Matt, hope ya dig it! I love you all, I do. Okay, okay. I'm done. Bye.

