

## Arabic Coffee

It was never too strong for us:  
make it blacker, Papa,  
thick in the bottom,  
tell again how the years will gather  
in small white cups,  
how luck lives in a spot of grounds.

Leaning over the stove, he let it  
boil to the top, and down again.  
Two times. No sugar in his pot.  
And the place where men and women  
break off from one another  
was not present in that room.  
The hundred disappointments,  
fire swallowing olive-wood beads  
at the warehouse, and the dreams  
tucked like pocket handkerchiefs  
into each day, took their places  
on the table, near the half-empty  
dish of corn. And none was  
more important than the others,  
and all were guests. When  
he carried the tray into the room,  
high and balanced in his hands,  
it was an offering to all of them,  
stay, be seated, follow the talk  
wherever it goes. The coffee was  
the center of the flower.  
Like clothes on a line saying  
You will live long enough to wear me,  
a motion of faith. There is this,  
and there is more.

**The Words under the Words  
(For Sitti Khadra, north of Jerusalem)**

My grandmother's hands recognize grapes,  
the damp shine of a goat's new skin.  
When I was sick they followed me,  
I woke from the long fever to find them  
Covering my head like cool prayers.

My grandmother's days are made of bread,  
a round pat-pat and the slow baking.  
She waits by the oven watching a strange car  
circle the streets. Maybe it holds her son,  
lost to America. More often, tourists,  
who kneel and weep at mysterious shrines.  
She knows how often mail arrives,  
how rarely there is a letter.  
When one comes, she announces it, a miracle,  
listening to it read again and again  
in the dim evening light.

My grandmother's voice says  
nothing can surprise her.  
Take her the shotgun wound and the crippled baby.  
She knows the spaces we travel through,  
the messages we cannot send &#151; our voices are short  
and would get lost on the journey.  
Farewell to the husband's coat,  
the ones she has loved and nourished,  
who fly from her like seeds into a deep sky.  
They will plant themselves. We will all die.

My grandmother's eyes say Allah is everywhere,  
even in death.  
When she talks of the orchard and the new olive press,  
when she tells the stories of Joha  
and his foolish wisdoms,  
He is her first thought, what she really thinks of  
His name.

"Answer, if you hear the words under the words --  
otherwise it is just a world with a lot of rough edges,  
difficult to get through, and our pockets full of stones."

## **My Grandmother in the Stars**

It is possible we will not meet again  
on earth. To think this fills my throat  
with dust. Then there is only the sky  
tying the universe together.

Just now the neighbor's horse must be standing  
patiently, hoof on stone, waiting for his day  
to open. What you think of him,  
and the village's one heroic cow,  
is the knowledge I wish to gather.  
I bow to your rugged feet,  
the moth-eaten scarves that knot your hair.

Where we live in the world  
is never one place. Our hearts,  
those dogged mirrors, keep flashing us  
moons before we are ready for them.  
You and I on a roof at sunset,  
our two languages adrift,  
heart saying, Take this home with you,  
never again,  
and only memory making us rich.

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