

## Blood

"A true Arab knows how to catch  
a fly in his hands,"  
my father would say. And he'd prove it,  
cupping the buzzer instantly  
while the host with the swatter stared.

In the spring our palms peeled.  
True Arabs believed watermelon  
could heal fifty ways.  
I changed these to fit the occasion.

Years before, a girl knocked,  
wanted to see the Arab.  
I said we didn't have one.  
After that, my father told me who he was,  
"Shihab" -- "shooting star" --  
a good name, borrowed from the sky.  
Once I said, "When we die, we give it back?"  
He said that's what a true Arab would say.

Today the headlines clot in my blood.  
A little Palestinian dangles a truck  
on the front page.  
Homeless fig, this tragedy with a terrible root  
is too big for us. What flag can we wave?  
I wave the flag of stone and seed,  
table mat stitched in blue.

I call my father, we talk around the news.  
It is too much for him,  
neither of his two languages can reach it.  
I drive into the country to find sheep, cows,  
to plead with the air:  
Who calls anyone *civilized*?  
Where can the crying heart graze?  
What does a true Arab do now?

## Darling

1.

I break this toast for the ghost  
of bread in Lebanon.  
The split stone, the toppled doorway.

Someone's kettle has been crushed.  
Someone's sister has a gash  
above her right eye.

And now our tea has trouble being sweet.  
A strawberry softens, turns musty,

overnight each apple grows a bruise.  
I tie both shoes on Lebanon's feet.

All day the sky in Texas which has seen  
no rain since June  
is raining Lebanese mountains, Lebanese  
trees.

What if the air grew damp with  
the names of mothers?  
The clear-belled voices of first-graders  
pinned to the map of Lebanon like a shield?  
When I visited the camp of the opposition

near the lonely Golan, looking northward  
toward  
Syria and Lebanon, a vine was springing  
pinkly  
from a tin can

and a woman with generous hips like my  
mother's  
said "Follow me."

2.

Someone was there. Someone not there  
now  
was standing. In the wrong place  
with a small moon-shaped scar on his left  
cheek  
and a boy by the hand.  
Who had just drunk water, sharing the glass.  
Who had not thought about it deeply  
though they might have, had they known.  
Someone grown and someone not-grown.  
Who thought they had different amounts  
of time left.

This guessing game ends with our hands in  
the air,  
becoming air.  
One who was there is not there, for no  
reason.  
Two who were there.

It was almost too big to see.

3.

Our friend from Turkey says language is so  
delicate  
he likens it to a darling.

We will take this word in our arms.  
It will be small and breathing.  
We will not wish to scare it.  
Pressing lips to the edge of each syllable.  
Nothing else will save us now.

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