

What Next?

Will he yell, call me cold,
dagger-eyed while the right
side of his mouth twitches,
bitterness spread on his face, like
peanut butter on whole wheat bread
fresh out of grandma's oven, or

Will he try to move in on my body,
reaching out a sly hand for a quick
caress before I say, "Don't."

Will he pull away, tears in his eyes,
and will I watch for them to spill over?

If they spill over, they're real.

If they linger at the lower eyelashes,
they are not real—crocodile tears—
and as soon as I reach out in compassion
that ol' croc will bite my hand off
and eat it, lightning fast.

Will he stay away while I anticipate

his next strike? If he will strike. No—
strike he will, and I won't see it coming.
After the crocodile has eaten my hand
will I still feel it, like a phantom limb,
for the rest of my life?

Will he keep coming around
Long after it's over, to ask:
“Have you seen my black boots,
the ones with the dealy bobbies
hangin' off the top?”

Will I have the courage to say,
“Nothing here belongs to you.”

Will each day melt into the next?
Pat after pat of butter dropped
in a cast-iron frying pan,
my inheritance from grandma:
--cast-iron frying pan
--dahlia bulbs
--and a black cat called Nuisance.

Will the man stop coming
around tomorrow, next week,

next year, next decade

next millennium, next lifetime?

And after the crocodile has gone,

digesting my precious hand in his belly,

what will I miss more?

My hand, or the crocodile?

Open Face Charlie

good ol' Charlie
spouting out gentlemanly obscenities
wondering why he can't get laid off
sometimes he does and then
his heart is too big or he gets restless
or he works and drinks
then he can't speak
but he talks a lot
when says good things
and his face opens
he remembers stuttering
because he is trying
to spit it out before he forgets
always eloquently muttering
he believes a certain lady's bellybutton
is the most beautiful he has ever seen
he said that and smiled
his face opened to reveal
dreams in the light of the crescent moon
the incessant ticking of the battery-operated alarm clock
which presently resides under his mattress

it stifled the dreams and frustrated the sleep
that had already eluded him
all he had to do was smile
so his face would open and remember
the woman at the party who wore rings on her toes
the one he knew he would love
like the rope (from what ship was it? the Balclutha?)
that must have been it
he wrapped it around and through the holes
draped it between the poles outside the bar
he wanted to put up a flagpole, too
and said something about someone shimmying up
the imaginary pole to put up the imaginary flag in a skirt
someone with a big heart, he said
his illusions—a soaring, diving critter grasping fantasy--are fascinating
if he could only choose the time and place
where he could smile that way
and open his face again to remember

Ramadan

Every woman has a role to play
in the gendered *sanctum sanctorum*

Greeting newcomers.

Assalaamualaikum.

Walaikumassalaam.

The women lead themselves.

They dive in and do what needs to be done

Turn on the heat.

without asking each other what needs to be done

Quiet the children

give them something to do

send them outside to the playground

Remove the aluminum foil

from the steaming dish

of saffron rice.

Argue over its position on the table.

Find spoons.

Offer refreshment.

Protect the vegetarian non-Muslim guest from meat. (Alhamdullilah)

Turn off the heat.

Set out chairs in the prayer room

For the women who can no longer kneel to pray

Turn on the monitor and speakers.

The imam will be delivering a sermon soon

and we want to see him and hear him

A sister draws out a long *subha*

and runs the beads through her fingers

She waits with closed eyes

And an expectant smile

for the call to prayer

Petite Gleam

I am filled with the light of a thousand stars.

The darkness is complete.

Everything else has disappeared.

Only stars exist. I blink.

I realize, in a moment of anticipation I can't look away.

I think I do, but I know my eyes have seen nothing else.

The brilliant dots of light grow larger.

They draw me in and absorb my essence.

My whole being begins to dissipate.

I am about to disappear from the earth and become a star.

I panic.

I resist, and my humanness washes over me.

I see everything physical flash before me in a language of patterns and symbols.

I am angry with myself for allowing my cowardice to overpower my curiosity for leaping into the strange and complete unknown.

I begin to feel myself again, and the stupidity of struggling against the terrible beauty is drawn into the design of my spiritual blueprint.

I cry out: I made a mistake! I'm ready to sacrifice my individuality to infinity!

But the moment is gone.

I had been offered a role in the evolution of spirit, to be an emanation, and I declined.

Tears well up in my eyes, and I see the stars.

I know that I can look away, but I resist the temptation.

I want to start over! Give me one more chance!

The tears wet my face and chin, flowing steadily down, cleansing my shame.

I look away, searching for solace.

There is nothing but the scents of my existence. The earth, the trees, and life, are comforting.

I'm almost relieved, except for my conscience, a demon that shakes its finger at me, reminding me of what could have been.

Tonight I will offer myself to the universe without hesitation. Perhaps it will be merciful in its acceptance of my petite gleam.

“Do what is best for you.”

Write about death.

Write about tears, fears, birth, beds, horses, shoes, warts, houses, hats and yards of thread...the years of yore.

“All of this is your death-test.”

Do we die? Are we bodies? Why?

“To fear the hour of death is to die without your heart, with hatred.”

How to read death:

Stare at the star, the star of death, birth, seas, shores, waters.

Your house. Our house. On this birthed earth our hearts hurt.

The hero of our day is the star of death.

Star of the abyss...rises....out of ashes...rises...out of dust...rises to hear us.

“Death is bare. Breath is hard to share.”

Are we death, birth, or both? Is death's door the hour of fear?

Ashes upon ashes, Dust upon dust, The truth is ours, In death we trust.

We are weary and we are tired.

So? Wear red shoes. Death does.

Death is at the door. Read her a story about us.

Rest. Wear a bath of rays.

“Do what is best for you.”