

Death in Winter

When I had heard you died—
I thought of the flightless Iranian deserts,
of the vultures that sat on its very borders,
and of the salt in the cracks of the Dead Sea,
of the hornet stuck in my French villa's bedroom;
I thought of the empty local church,
which law had forbidden me to enter;
And of my brother's garden in Nablus
 (where olives fall from trees like teeth
 from the mouth of a dead man)
I thought of the yak-herder near Lhasa
Who had once asked me:
 "Is loneliness a Western disease?"
And I graced him with my silence
and a thick myrrh that swept down my
gaunt cheeks and suddenly *cursèd he*
was, for my miracles are lies.

When I had heard you died—
I remembered the feeling of your face
cradled in the palms of my hands,
and the hook of your nose, as it
caught on the blue moonlight
near Al Shifa, and I remembered
 how soft you felt
 how beautiful you looked

as I placed kisses upon your temple
and on your cheeks and fingers;
I remembered how the shale
beneath us crackled like some
brittle Babylonian scripture,
and how you called me your soul;
I remembered how you pointed
one midday by some grace to
a line of swallows fleeing,
I remembered how unburdened
you were in my arms,
And how I felt as careless as
your mother unwinding laundry
at the rise of twilight.

When I had heard you died—
I knew then that half of my life
had been viciously divorced from me.
That night I dreamt of headless children,
and kettles slow-ticking over flaming mines.

I wallowed and lamented like Adam,
prayed to antic God to Resurrect you,
How I had felt for the curve of your spine
in the darkness of my sheets, and was met
with an absolute nothingness.

I wept and I wept
And I decided your death a deedless martyrdom,
a needless slaughter, a *perversion* to Life;

I knew that you had purified me,
and in making me weightless your spirit
 was released, and I resented you for that.
Yet I love you more than anything,
more than the universe itself
 more than God Himself
 more than the stars themselves
 more than firelights and unicorns
 and philosophy and literature
 and deep-thinking and scholarliness
I felt a Sea-longingness infect me,
And I heard the gulls cry overhead each time
 I smelt the salt of sea water
 that your natured love had adopted.
And I wished to drown in the endless
Mediterranean seas, away from Man.

It was the way in which when I smelt
the very crook of your neck, the strong
 scent of oud hit me,
and that deep satisfaction in knowing
exactly where it came from. When you
handed me a cup of coffee, in the same
cream tea-stained mug, with a chip
right next to the handle, from when
I frightened you by grabbing you from
behind (*like a lonely lover*), and verses
from al-Ma'ari around its rim, a cheap

and touristy thing it was. And when you
poured a light flat white into it, you said:
“Coffee’s the drink of mourners, you git.”

... *In the way in which* we threw stones
into the Sea of Galilee, and each one
would skip 1, 2, 3 times before sinking
obeying the ancient will inscribed within
the very swing of your arm
the very arch that your fingers bent into
as the stone flew from your hands
How you would say the water was holy!
yet I would watch it take without giving
and I would see you beside it and think,
‘how could such a thing be blessed by anything
remotely divine, when you stay outside it?’
When in your grandmother’s flat in
Haifa, your voice was low and tender,
and rumbling in all the right ways,
telling me that some souls are indeed not *made*
to remain in flesh for long
that some spirits are truly just too luminous
that they burn incessantly and writhe in
wanting to escape the FLESH
too burning - hot to be held in muscle and bone
And I had called you arrogant!
The gall on me to call such twirling words
arrogant and I had meant it, in truth.

Yet I miss that arrogance now

I miss it as one misses a limb amputated.
a phantom that twitches as a doorway
annoyingly stubs a toe, miss it as one
misses the non-sexual intimacy of a throe
your arms around me and mine around you
To be able to reach out to you and *feel you*
with such ease! How privileged I was
to be in a presence such as yours still breathing ...

I.

That night you told me of your sickness
it was a humidly-hot summer, and the air
was curdling and disgusting;
yet the night brought solace. In the kitchen
with copper pans you told me with a certainty
with a reckoning solemnity
that you were going to die,
and you were sure of it. You gave me
your blessing to outlive you,
and to grow *beyond* you,
You had wrecked me so that the
red lentils fell from my hands
like insects scuttling across the tiled floor.
You only bent down silently and
picked them up
gently, and individually,
and in my stillness

I could only think that you would never die
the Messiah *must* be you,
the Christ *is* you,
your death is a logical impossibility
that any Second Coming would be false
without your breath upon it.
And then in Winter, you left me.
Gone as simply as a flame;
bereft of my stillness.

II.

I loved our time in Sweden,
that silly time that beguiled me ...
Because whenever I think of it now
I remember the softness of your body
and the grace of your legs
as you laid in the snow that topped all meadows
and topped all trees,
spreading your arms out wide,
singing with me, and *humming* with me,
carving your very shape and name into the ground
into the very earths themselves, laughing!
“To make the angels jealous!” you said.
Your name was blurred,
dark and childish,
and I only kissed your forehead then
because I didn’t know how else
to keep you from disappearing.

III.

My favorite picture of you was when you *kneeled*
before me,

and you were half-naked
and drenched in pool water

You had taken my foot into your hands and
with the slow gentleness of someone pouring wine
for the dead,

you poured the water over it—
my ankles were pale and shaking ...

Yet you soothed them with your touch,
your words, your kisses,
and washed my feet then and there.

I do not know what happened that day.

(and why you washed my feet
and why I was trembling so)

and why your eyes were halfway-to-crying

But I certainly know, something changed
between us in that moment

I felt you were defiled,
but deeper still,
it felt like forgiveness.

IV.

Poorest of all, *you held my heart*
telling me that there
you would wait for me!

I feel you somewhere, but ...

... it is not with me—

I cannot feel your FLESH, your SPIRIT,

Your

dastardly words, y-

-our beautiful words

And as I lament *for you*

and

write this *for you*

I feel a great unsettling feeling that will not pass.