

Flames at Hurr Mountain

I

History has a way of
moving the heart backward.

A way of moving it forward
to protect its past, its tired mind.

Its deep stories. Dark angles.
The phobia it sculpts out of night.

It's not about a song.
It's about a ruin, a voice's fainting crescendo.

It's loud. It's narrow. It's quiet.
This is something we know—it stirs.

Stirs the branches of darkness. Stirs the
echoes of rivers. Stirs what is not ours.

And what's ours. Gone and gone.
Here and here, there and there.

II

The mountains hold words,
hold gods, hold flame.

Flame that distracts shadows,
and what stands behind them.

The mountains are high
and low, low and high.

Higher than we can find, like
a word impossible to grow.

A seed impossible to grow.
A glow impossible to stop.

An arrow impossible to stop.
A poison impossible to find.

Love impossible to find,
like that kiss that missed your lips.

Like the laughter cutting breath
in half to save itself a piece

of what still beats inside.
Alive as dead.

Dead and alive—
one bird after the other, chirping.

There is no God but God,
no desire but wind,

caught deep in a mountain
trying to rise to an earth that awaits

the opening of flames
we wish we'd seen before.

Brokenmusic

Maybe when you are ready for music
 every instrument around is broken
Maybe when you are ready for freedom
 your heart can no longer beat
Maybe when you grow madness
 you find what you were meant to see
Maybe if you show me
 how desire begs
play a tune in E minor
 the slow river of wings will
reveal itself.

But it had to come to this instead:
 a broken violin
 the heart, unsolved
 an argument with Jesus or Mohammed
 —exile has its ways.
Now your breath is a flat tune
limping its way around
the wake of your mouth.

In the Ruins

*Pero yo ya no soy yo
Ni mi casa es ya mi casa.*

Federico García Lorca

He comes without her.

I ask him if he lives close to the sea now.

He says,

*There is no water only water
no song only song
no version of death
I'm comfortable with.*

I imagine his body against the waves
and a rock beside him, words tight around it.

*There is no cry only cry
no view of Carmel only Carmel
no one around to listen.*

Where is the country?

It seems useless to count
how long it's been since we've seen it.

He says nothing. And I wonder
why she didn't come—
had she forgotten
his name in Arabic?

I move toward him. Move to feel the light
against my dream, to feel what remains.

He is everywhere. Who is he now?
Who am I?
Have we found a dove,
an earth?
He is everywhere.
Then she arrives and she asks him,
*Why are you here—
didn't I tell you to leave?*
You did, he said, but like you, I couldn't go.

After Mahmoud Darwish

The Unnatural Apologies of Shadows

We say lightning has no wings
when it slides down our houses

We say loss is just a condition
we acquire to bury our pity further

We say the bleeding hands
on the table filled with red wine
imported products and passports
are just reminders of
who we have become

We have no titles no birthright
no groves or Shakespeare
to return to

We apologize for the fear
growing out of our ribs

Apologize for the numbers
still etched on our tongues

Listen, *Tonight*

to the leaves murmuring
in the yellow fields
to the aches of a peasant
the pain of an abandoned child
look at Tiberias disguised in shadows
at the miniscule footsteps of stars
feel the touch of a beggar

and answer me why we pretended—
when we measured the earth

and there was no space for both of us