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Orange, The Color of Red And Yellow

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Nazih M. Makki

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ORANGE, THE COLOR OF
RED AND YELLOW

By
Nazih M. Makki

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

ORANGE, THE COLOR OF RED AND YELLOW

By

Nazih M. Makki

The poems of this collection differ in their subject matter. A third describes the relationship between mother and son. A few of these also reflect the relationship between the Occident and the Orient. A number of the collection are love poems, some are animal poems. The rest ranges from celebration of a newly born baby to the drowning of a friend to lamenting Grace Kelly's death to falling in love with shoes.

The mother in the first part of this collection establishes herself as equal to the male, and leads her own life as she pleases. Simultaneously, she does not devour her infant son, but takes care of him. The mother also interferes at a random moment to aid the helpless child in the Orient. Intimate relationships break down in the love poems, even the love making does not take its full course. The animal poems portray human hunger.

G/20609

For Diane Wakoski

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Roots

I came out of my Mother's womb unstrapped,
as free and fresh and innocent as fish.
I breathed the air of this Earth
like everyone else before me and around me.
On the milk of my Mother,
on the arms of my Mother I grew,
a two year old boy
with eyes like olive leaves
and hair like chestnut
and pain churning between the heart and lips,
hung fast
like the arrow of an Indian warrior.

My Mother married again.

I bloomed in a brick roofed house that overlooked
the small town below.
The two pine trees that stood like guards on each side,
had been planted by my father.
And flowers as many as stars in a furrow,
were watered by my Mother.
We tilled the brown soil,
ate olives, potatoes and wheat.
A water well behind the willows by the house,
had been dug thirty feet deep.

My brother fell in it and drowned.
Sitting around the fire and
breaking chestnuts in the cold nights,
I had told him fables
about us fighting the Indians and killing them.

Decay runs through the sap of living things;
carrying our wrinkled flesh and shit,
we hurry back to Earth
where we dissolve and transform into dirt.
But on our journey between Mother and Earth,
we were driven out of our lands,
chased by the whizzing of bullets
and the roar of Skyhawks and Mirages.
We ran to the cities like scared mice.

I used to leave my house in Beirut at night,
throw a large shadow when walking before the full moon,
and disappear among the heads of pedestrians.
Faint, overlapping red, blue and green lights
lashed my back and reduced my shadow.
My voice was lost in the jangling of trams
as I grumbled at the hubbub.
Ships unloaded at the wharves of seaports;
and harnessed like an animal to my load,
I earned the bread of the day.

When fire began melting the fat off the buildings in Beirut,
and the people gnashed at each other's throats
and gnawed on each other's flesh
and a fluid with the color of damask patched the streets
and Adonis bled heavily to the sea,
I threw myself in a ship and sailed away.
I left behind fighters wearing green uniforms,
blowing away facades with cannons and rockets;
rotting bodies on the ground,
filling the stomachs of dogs and rats;
boys raising V signs,
challenging camera lenses and death;
and Beirut rising and falling,
chunks of fire and ashes.
I promised my Mother and this land I'd always come back.

I took from Beirut only old memories
and a dry wound glowing over my forehead.
I travelled, hasped with a heart like a grenade.

Slow in the escape but accompanied by the stars,
ignoring the trade of fishing whales and precious stones,
I began weaving words into tassels of fire.

The torch in the hand of the Liberty Statue illumined my way
as I came out from the sea.
Standing by Abraham Lincoln's grave,

I started scrubbing the old wounds off my heart
and singing with Walt Whitman
the "Song of Myself."

In the land Christopher Columbus had discovered,
I met a woman
with eyes like jades and smooth like velvet,
with hair plaited and shining like spikes of wheat.
She wiped the dehydrated blood drops off my forehead,
and rubbed off the dust
that had fallen over my lips.
From her generous and shimmering uterus,
burst forth our baby.

Crossing my legs on the sofa
and staring at my daughter,
I write my poems; still hanging in my mind
throbbing pictures of the brown soil.
Sucking on the lip of my tequila drink in a bar,
I can see myself drawing incessantly from the well
buckets full of air and dead branches of magnolia;
under the pine trees,
I can smell the warm blood of my father.
With a scratch of my pen, Mother,
I can lick on the tip of my tongue
the seas between us,
and return to Earth to sleep like my fathers and decay.

When I wake up in the morning,
I find myself sleeping on my wife's breast..
like a child.

My Mother, my Deserter

You packed your clothes.

You looked at the red wool shawl
my father had bought last Christmas,
touched it with your fingers,
and left it hanging in the closet
to sink in your past.

Your boyfriend's hand beat the horn
for you to hurry up;
his back sweated inside his shirt,
or his shaking hand snapped accidentally
and squeezed the beep out.

My eyes stared at the gray car
and the restless body behind the steering wheel;
I lifted my face toward you,
and retreated before your steps.

My eyes locked on yours
asking in silence
if there was a space for Dad and myself.
But you ran to your toilet,
forgetting me
in the rush of powder, rosy lipstick and black velvet hat.

When you kissed me on the cheek with trembling,
dry lips,
words jostled in my throat,

almost wounding it as they crept out.

I stood like your red shawl,
envying your suitcase as you walked out,
stepped into the car
and shut the door.

A Letter to my Mother After She Called

Your voice tinkled in my ears
like drops of water falling
from a closed tap
and tossing on dry cement.
I had looked at the telephone many times;
my eyes bagging it to ring.
It had answered by blotting itself on my pupils.
It had slept there.

Then,
the telephone triggered out of its long slumber,
drilling the air, as if making holes in my eyes.
My hand opened,
the fingers wound around the telephone,
pressing it against the palm.
I felt I was holding your voice in my hand.
Your voice
seemed to pull me out of the house;
and in my mind I went along with it,
searching for you in a booth,
in a luxury home?
in a bed you'd be lying on,
and a man standing before you
urging you repeatedly to hang up?

Anyway, your voice entered the room.

It was the sap that drenched
every cell in my body, and the bones.

I wonder why you called after all this time.
Are you coming back?

Please,
dial the same number again!

My Mother Comes Back

You came back...

I had waited in a dry plain,
a tulip folding its petals
which pressed on each other, packing the pain inside.
I was withering away.

Your knocking came on the door
like rain pelting on leaves.
We stood for a while, looking at one another.
Our mouths remained closed, tension growing
between the teeth and the throat.
Your smile seemed to shoot out
and touch me.
Your fragrance raced toward me
and rested on my breath.
The fingers of my hands flung open,
trying to reach out to you.
Amid the ongoing traffic between our eyes,
my cheeks changed their color
like two litmus papers dipped in sulfuric acid.

You held me inside your arms.
Between your hair and neck,
I found my shade.
Breathing in your bosom,

I felt the pain squeeze out.

I stood a blossom;

the light gulping my head.

You said,

you came back to take me away.

Seurat

I steer my car through the nascent traffic jam down the
bridge
as carefully as a sailor directs his ship among icebergs.
My wife almost punches her fingertips in the felsh of my
shoulder,
and asks me if I saw the look of the South Vietnamese child,
piercing through his narrow eyeslits
as if calling on us to make him our son,
if I felt it swamp us like a huge wave.
The bottom of my feet press like two sponges on the pavement
above the sealine;
I swing the nylon thread of my fishhook after fixing
a shiny rubber fish to the barb,
and flick it onto the surface.
I hear the hook plop as the last drops of water are sucked
into a drainage-hole.

A child comes walking towards me;
his feet sink in the sand,
his ankles, two shells sometimes half covered,
sometimes completely naked.
A rusty newspaper goes flapping in his direction,
wraps itself around his tiny legs and flaps between them
as if attempting to lift him off the ground
and blow him away,

before it pulls itself and rolls past him.
He throws his eyes at me,
watching the nylon thread half submerged in water.
I feel a tremor in my hand as a fish
glides by and touches the bait.
The child comes near with his hand hanging from his mouth
down the chin, only hooked to his teeth
by the distal phalanx of his forefinger.
His eyes hold the fish
that have risen to the neck of the basket.
He withdraws his finger, gesticulates at the basket,
says, "Fith," and inserts his finger back in his mouth.
A coagulated curdy white line drools from his nostrils
and creeps down the cavity of his upper lip.
His black curly hair stands out;
the wind fails to bend it.
The dried sweat had glued the hairs together.

The nylon thread stretches and slants straight as a fish.
The upper part of the wooden fishhook curves
as if stooping to dive after the cold blooded animal.
I roll the thread which seems to disappear inside my belly.
As soon as the fish is lifted above the water surface,
it squirms and sways,
trying to disengage itself from the choking hook.
The child's smile rushes like foam.
The fish wriggles at the tip of his thrust finger

as his mouth suavely spits the words: fith! fith!

I rap on his back and push him away.

His mother who sent him after a fish,

drags him away by the hand.

I watch them fade away, two specks at the horizon,
then nothing..

I raise my head, and a bridge runs above my face.

My wife's voice nudges me.

I ease my foot off the brakes,

and snap as a wave bursts from the bottom of the sea.

Morning Sickness

My wife's belly has grown
like a soccer ball inflated with little air.
She can see my smile riding my cheeks,
almost touching my eyebrows.

I slide my hand under her night clothes,
and place it on her abdominal skin
to feel the embryo's intermittent
tremors jump like a heartbeat.

She pushes me away,
and runs into the bathroom, retching
and holding her mouth with a hand
she already folded like a bowl.

Her knees bending,
her buttocks almost touching the floor,
her palms gripping the rim of the toilet,
she squeezes on the white plastic
as the fluid forces its way
out of her throat.

I push my knees under her elbows,
and grasp her shoulders
as the bursting yellowish water and foam
seem to drag her head into the stool.

The tongue dry and sour,
the face emaciated and bluish,

the eyes bulging and soaked with tears,
she rises carrying her load
to stutter our embryo's life away,
"Your child is killing me;
I feel like aborting it.. today."

A Picnic in Africa

The trunk snapped open
as I dealt the key in the hole;
meat vegetables fruits bread
water buckets blankets piled, leaving no breathing room.
I walked in a field knitted with short, brown weeds
to gather some wood for a fire
being assembled inside the leg of the tree.
I saw him sitting in the shade.

His eyes slowly roll,
his wide, black eyes move
between the Mother and the empty pot.
He sucks on his dry, rough lower lip
which splinters
as the thin dried layer of earth breaks
under the touch of first drops of rain.
He opens his mouth;
his tongue is a frosted asphalt.
The head and the upper apparently long limbs
cling to the trunk
as reluctantly detaching yellow leaves
rest on the ground, hold to it,
yet tremble before the approaching wind
that cuts down the branches in a nearby forest
like a mad sword.

The Mother hears the silent cry.

She turns her face away;

a hot teardrop glides on her cheek.

Rhythmic drum beats breaking the silence,

rise from the neighborhood,

a happy loud male voice follows the beat,

the children and their mother dance before their hut;

the Father caught a big rat.

Orange, The Color of Red And Yellow

My mother worked in your father's orange orchard
after my father had left with the sailors.
His ship had never returned to port;
nor had he sent a telegram
or a post card of the African lions he dreamed of.

My mother worked in your father's orange orchard
to feed five children.
She buried her feet in rubber boots,
and hid her body inside a nylon coat.
Yellow plunged in the mud.
Yellow was drenched by the rain.
Yellow was hooked
by the arm and conveyed from tree to tree.
Yellow the size of fists,
was round among the leaves.
Yellow was the ladder that lifted my mother to higher
branches.

You came down,
carrying the lunch in a tray,
regulating the pace of your steps,
choosing where to place your feet
as carefully as my mother piled the oranges in the basket,
so that the heels of your shoes did not dip in the mud.

Your eyes flashed as they embraced me,
your lips parted,
your cheeks rose like the upper edge of an apple.

As the resilient branch snapped from my mother's hand,
cold drops flung and stung her back and neck.
I left her entangled in the branches,
and strolled with you down to the edge of the orchard.

My mother thought her husband would come back
bringing gold in sacks swathed to the saddles of asses.
An orange dropped from her hand
and rolled on the ground.
She ran after it,
retrieved it and put it in the basket.

You sliced an orange
and sucked the round pieces.
I squeezed the juice in my mouth..

At night, you lighted an oil lamp for me.
Your clothes blew the scent of leaves
as you pushed your head inside my arms
like the bough that had entered your room.
You asked about my mother.
She was sitting on the couch knitting a sweater
for me- striped red and yellow.

You said black matched my dark hair and green eyes.
But, yellow was the color of lions.
Red and yellow were the color of fire,
of the sun, of an explosion,
of a meteor penetrating the earth's atmosphere
and plucking a piece of the ground.
I told you I had come everyday at noon
not to eat lunch,
although I pretended I wanted to help mother,
but to receive your eyes
that had seemed to fasten me between their black lashes.
And I trembled as you blinked.
We realized the oil level had shrunk
as the lamp burned;
and I had to return to mother. Had I?

Mother was in bed counting the cracks in the ceiling.
One, two three.

Three years ago he had pressed on her hands
and promised with tears sparkling in his eyes,
he'd come back whenever she called on him.

An orange at the bottom, an orange at the top,
an orange to the right, an orange to the left,
and many more in the middle.

One basket going, one basket coming.

How many baskets in all

did she fill and did she unload?

One two three four, five six seven eight...
She lost the count.

Mother thought of her makeup
lying on the toilet,
of the dust that had smudged the mirror,
covered her brushes and combs.

She would not swipe at the dust as she used to,
with the kitchen towel.

One shoe in the closet, another under the bed,
a dress in the corner on the floor,
a dress by the toilet,
panties were hung on the bathtub.

Mother would not rub the lipstick pen against her lips.

My tongue brushed the sugar off your neck
like the wind that fondled the branches.
My hands picked from your chest.
I felt my body wore the color of lava
before the curdled white exploded.

My mother picked oranges in December
with hands steady as the sun.

She dreamed of gold
 wrapped around saddles,
of her man coming home.

Pick. Pick. Pick..

One full basket going.

One empty basket coming.

Falling in Love With Shoes

My father who fed and washed horses
and saved the coins he earned,
refused to buy me the pair of shoes
I had seen laced together behind a shop window,
hanging as two adjacent petals unfold
from the base of a field lily.
I went to the shop twice everyday
and stood by the window.
I stared silently at the narrow frontal frame of the shoes
nosing towards me like a floral branch.
I would hear these shoes
rest on the ground with a thudding noise
and bend a little
where the toes join the metatarsal bone,
before lifting my feet as I walked along.
They had long strings, soft as flowers,
that I would tie
and let fall on the sides of the shoe
like two opposite petals of a rose.
Their heels, those two packed tulips
dangling but beyond my reach,
would push me an inch and a half taller.
In addition to the brown leather shoes,
the murky half-boots, the white flat pair
that could be folded inside the hand,

and to the red pair which has a rose
the size of a nail on the side of each shoe
and which echoes
the sound of knocking on doors
if rapped on the soles with knuckles,
I would wear this pair to school
and pull up my pants a little above the ankles
whenever my classmates looked at me.

At the shop,
my father picked a pair of sandals
soled with tire rubber,
and haggled ferociously over the price.
But my eyes clung to MY shoes,
and seemed to pluck them from the hook
as I would the petals of a coneflower
saying to myself, he would buy me this pair,
he won't, he would, he won't.
I thrust myself out of the shop
before my father handed the money to the owner.

I remembered the sole pair
my father wore to work,
to the marketplace and where people gathered.
I woke up with the birds,
tucked his shoes under my arm
and headed for the hills.

I had told mother,
if my father wanted his shoes back,
I would only trade him!

As The Third Shift Goes Home

On a morning like this the cold has been forever,
and the bench in the bus stop faces
the gray sky, and sad gray eyes
sweep the corner at Warren and Russell to catch a glimpse
of the Dearborn bus.

The frost bites my feet through
the soles of my boots.

My nose red and soft, drips...

The frost falls on my mustache like a ghost;
the hairs stick to each other.

It seems my mustache is growing soap.

As I hide myself inside my coat
the wind cuts my face like a saw.

My gray eyes looking from under my hat, hug the road.
Dearborn bus come and take home
where warmth fills the spaces in my wife's hair
and food is cooking
and vapor smoke pumps up from the pot.

Time passes by like an ant climbing a wall;
it falls,
climbs and falls.

My eyelids shut,
and open as if lifting a load.

If a knife cuts my skin
would blood flow?

Like the ant, I climb the bus steps;
the driver pulls me in.

I sit, and think of those who have
no roof above their heads
and of my child waiting for me at the door.

Buried at Sea

The sun is bedded in the pool,

a mirror reflecting heat.

My body wriggles

as the sweat pinches my skin.

I remember August 1968.

He and I have grown in each other's shadow,

14 summers since birth.

And the neighbors have often called me by his name.

We walk barefooted on the soft hot asphalt

to a small lake in a plain among the hills.

And the road stretches on.

The sun is pasted to the top of the blue dome,

a thin silver glaring sheet

with a thousand oranges, peaches, red apple colored rim.

The tips of twigs stand still,

and the birds bury their bodies in the shade.

I see him in my mind lying by the water,

wearing a black swimming suit,

glazed with suntan cream from neck to toe.

I rush out through the door

and take the hot soft road to the lake.

I abandon the endless asphalt,

and walk on the shorter dirt road.

My legs race one another on the sand;
dust rises behind me like thin smoke.
And the sun is falling behind my back
like a fireball.

I run,
and the fireball chases me
till we both catch up with him--
the one, the neighbors call me by his name--
in the plain among the hills.

I remember, heads floating.

He is far ahead, all alone,
his arms rowing and rowing.

His body heavier, is getting heavier,
his hands struggle to hold on to the
ropes of water as they slip away.
The eye of the sun, wide open, is
sucking him, sucking him.
I hurl myself into the lake;
the burning colors fall into my eyes
as my arms and legs propel my body through.
I reach the spot where he has been sucked down.
My body cleaves the surface.
I divide the depth before me with both arms.
I feel the cold slither around my belly and ribs.

I come up
with my hands dressed in water.

Suddenly,
he is all alone, head facing the bottom,
arms stretching and silent,
the surface gripping him by his black hair.
My skin wrinkles; pin-heads stand out
like sand grains.

Summer 70 and 75, summer 80 and 81
summer of the years yet to come,
my body wriggles
as the sweat pinches my skin.

I take off my clothes
and throw myself head down,
a dagger diving through.
I reach out for the bottom;
the mirror ahead is trembling
under the shaken waves.
I come up naked,
a blade glittering in the light.
I dive again and again till the sun sinks
in the pulling night.

Elegy For Grace Kelly

If I were Superman,
if I were Superman,
I'd circle the earth,
racing backwards against time,
and plunge to your car
before the brakes failed to bridle it,
before it slipped
off the edge of the road,
I'd dig my shoes in the asphalt
and pull, even if the smoke
of burnt tires coiled between my legs,
even if it hit my face and soiled my lungs,
I'd pick you up
and hide you under my cloak
from the wind,
from the eyes of those who had admired you
and envied you,
I'd carry you on my back,
back to the States
away from those who had put your car in a frantic stampede.

I sit in my room behind a closed door,
biting on my cigarette,
beating my typewriter to death.

The Modern Fable of Cadmus And The Dragon

My sister was kidnapped while she was taking a walk on the dry rim of the sea. I was told a calf had forced her on his back, and plunged into the sea like a submarine; only her head was seen above the water. I knew the police could not chase this pirate who changed himself into an ox and sailed like a submarine, and bring my sister back. Neither could I. Realizing only Cadmus could slay the animals of the brine, and catch this calf, I waited for him on the outdoor steps of my house, gazing at the horizon, and digging at night, the darkness with my eyes.

After a long wait, Cadmus appeared, his sword hanging below his waist, his Phoenician ship mooring at the shore, and his sailors' hands gripping the oars. He swore by the eyes of his sister Europa that he would kill the calf and restore my sister Yfaf.

The oars' strokes pushed the ship into the water. For twenty days and nights, we rowed looking for the calf. Seeing only black and blue, hearing only the oars' strokes, the sailors grumbled and roared urging Cadmus to turn the helm a half-moon.

Suddenly, bubbles rose to the surface, and the upper huge, green body of the dragon shot out; water sloped down his

lateral cliffs like Niagra Falls, dripped from the sides of his eye sockets. We stood trembling and looking at him from a ship toy. The huge waves tilted it, and foam flooded the deck. The dragon's long neck stooped toward us, and the mouth picked up a man, as if it had tucked a sardine between his lips. Cadmus lunged at the animal with his sword, driving it in the eye as the dragon's head swooped down. It bounced upward; the sword springing up and down. A thick line of blood crept below his temple.

I appeared from behind a box, and shouted repeatedly that the dragon was going to die. The others remained glued to their places, and their tongues tied to their lower jaws. Cadmus pulled me by the arm back to my hiding place. The dragon steadied his head and blew a pole of fire, burning the masts; some wood plopped into the water. Cadmus ordered us to row back before the beast incinerated the ship. I did not think he would cower before a dragon and I told him so.

The men sweated as their chests continually bent forward and their backs backward almost touching the deck, and their hands rotated the oars, tearing the sea's surface. The dragon's fire chased the ship, gobbled some sailors and some wood of the hull. As the ship scuttled away, Cadmus declared that we were riding the sea back home. I realized if I wanted to rescue my sister, I must do it myself.

My House

This house that I inherited from my father, is made of wood. Although I was the only heir, I hesitated for a year to move into this square body. Looking at the ceiling and the corners, then down to where I stood, I remembered I had strolled among trees and slept under them many nights. I had imagined they whispered to me, xylem, xylem, and I smiled in my sleep. I stare at my house now; the roof is a prism of chocolate tiles with a window as big as my head facing the West. The walls are logs horizontally fixed with their edges overlapping. The moment those logs were chopped down, the clammed xylem stopped popping out other xylem. I dwell in a dead body. My flesh shrinks. And I realize at night that the ceiling looks down at me, and nods. Through this silent conversation with the wood of my house, I have developed the yoga of touching my death.

Ode to my Newly Born Son

We had waited for you for nine long months,
and watched you grow
pound by pound inside your mother's belly.
You pushed yourself out of her uterus
and slid into the doctor's hands
as a wet cube soap glides into the bathtub.
He received your tremulous body,
and raised you toward your mother;
your face blotted
her pains and agonies out.
Her voice purled, plunging slowly into a coma.
The doctor slapped you on the ass;
but still, you refused to let us hear your voice.

You were transferred on the palms of an assistant
to another table, in this silver dawn;
your hands making fists,
as though clutching invisible flowers' stalks.
Your skin sunk in blue,
was pummelled lightly, and oxygen
was blown into your nostrils.
Paroxysms of pink plumaged your body;
your cries burst, widening the distance
between your cradle and crave.
The music gushing from your mouth,

kicked all buds open,
shot the branches long,
forcing them to snap and dangle;
yet I kept all this sudden growth
hemmed inside my chest
until your mother's face restored its color.
Standing by her and looking at you,
I asked in wonder, how could this body
as thick as my thigh,
merge from a tiny flower?

Rejoicing to the spring as it is beginning,
to the floral disks breaking and blooming,
to the trees flourishing green,
to the uterus that had held you inside its petals
and spat you, rubbed with its red perfume,
I celebrate you birth.

Your cries at night, fragrant thorns,
pierce my flesh.
I fling the overwhelming sleep off my eyes.
Your body trembles in the dark;
your open mouth searches for your mother's nipples
as your little head quivers sideways.
Somnolence sucks the moisture in our eyelids;
as we sit up changing your diaper, feeding you
and trying to calm you down,

they stand over our eyes,
pinkish semi fuchsia leaves.

With my mouth,
I caress your limbs that press
under my lips as apricots.
I am happy to see them kick aimlessly
as slowly as applying feet on brakes,
and touch with their warmth, my chin and cheeks;
to see the little mushroom between your legs, swing
and burst with urine, soaking your mother's neck.

I break away from the bustle of the day
and hurry back home to you and your mother,
and carry you on my fingers,
as if on the tip of trees.
The laughter rolls in my mouth
when your tiny lips unfurl
and wrinkles are punched at the sides of your mouth
below your puffed cheeks,
and when your voice falls in my ears
as the rustle of flowers
when rubbing against the wire fence.
Your irises, two dayflowers,
seem to touch my eyes
and apply their blue color on my eyelashes.
Their spark shoots into my brain:

soon, you'll be wobbling in your baby walker
and toppling the garbage at the sink with its front,
pulling the TV antenna down, wondering what has happened
when it bounces out of your hand and back out of your reach,
turning the TV volume very loud
and running away of fright not knowing what the loud voice
is and where it has come from.

African Native And His Cat

Acid goes on gnawing
on the walls of my stomach.
A mouse sees the cupboard
where I used to keep my food,
as a football yard. But I must declare,
it wouldn't find playing there, pleasing.
Vapor smoke whirled upward
from the distant houses of the foreigners
as I searched in the wood for garbage bags.
My cat Ming, meows as he raises his chin
and stretches his neck towards me.
I tell him, it is summer
and he should look outside for food.
He inserts himself under my angled leg
after I squat on the floor,
and rubs his back back and forth
against the ganglion of my calf.
His round and innocent face with two forks of hair
joined below the nose,
stares at me with jade colored eyes.
They seem to be looking from the far back of his head.
Ming raises the pitch of his repetitive meowing,
as if demanding to be fed.
With his tongue, he cleans the coat that wears
the color of a magnolia tree.

He spends the night
scratching the walls and the cupboard.

I open the door in the morning.

Alone,

he rushes as a beam of light dashes onto darkness.

Free, except of the weight of hunger pressing on the nerves
of his stomach and swelling like a tumor,

Ming carries his map inside his brain
as he goes out for the hunt.

I stand by the window, watching him.

He stops, extends his forelegs forward
and supports his weight on them;

his back arches, as if a hump has grown from it.

A rat, the shape of an old Volkswagen, crosses
the distance between a jade plant and a rock.

Ming sits on his hindlegs, and contracts his body
like a worm. He crawls toward the rat
and waits, scanning it with his eyes.

Then, a sudden leap, and the paws simultaneously strike
the prey's head on both sides.

The rat freezes like an animal in a post card.

His talons jutting out,

Ming sits near his prey, guarding it.

The cycle for securing food ends

as Ming's claws pickax the rat's head.

The prey's wounds drool red,
while its tail lies motionless and straight.
Ming's teeth grip the rat by the nape of its neck;
he runs to his secret place to eat his meal.
I taste my saliva as I move away from the window.

Nearly an Obstruction

After I cross half the distance between the door
and the garage,

I stop suddenly
as if my feet have been glued to the pavement.

My eyes are pegged to the ground:

a snake!

It is straight and red like a thick metal rod
immersed in fire.

Its head throws a black shadow on the pavement.

Its eyes, those two round bulging brown and green irises,
have caught my body and frozen it
in their sharp gaze.

I stumble, reaching out for a screwdriver on the grass
like a cripple with a metal leg.

My black cat as though from nowhere slides
between myself and the snake;

the lunge makes her hindlegs bend,
and the rear part of her belly sweep the ground
as she presses her forelegs against it.

Instantly, she stands up
and poses as a stop sign.

She shields her nose and mouth with the left foreleg
and pounds the snake with the right one
after the needle-pointed nails have extended fully out

and the paw has poised as a sledge.
I watch the cat hammer the head,
driving her nails in it.

She holds it in the middle by her teeth,
and walks away; the head and tail dragged
along her sides on the grass.
I lift the garage door open.

The Neighbor's Dog

Watching in the dark through the window
the dog burying his nose in his hindlegs on the bed,
I wish I had long and loose ears,
slender body, thick hair and four legs.
I wish I was a member of the canine family.

Sitting at the gazebo,
I look out
and the dog with furry black hair is being washed.
His owner sprinkles water at him from a green hose,
and rubs the soap cube round and round on his body.
Foam rumples appear like thirsty lips.
I feel my skin turns to a thousand mouths sucking for water.
The soap begins shrinking
as the hose punctures holes in it.
I feel the cold water fall on my face and chest,
the deluging chilliness numb my skin.
The dog shakes his flanks and head
sideways; drops are flailed,
drip from his belly hair
as they would down my penis.

Every Year in The Feast of Sacrifice

The ram is dragged to the cemented center of the front yard
by a rope.

Is it a cravat wrapped around his neck
to elevate his status,
or a sign inherited from Canaan
to move him a step closer to the knife?

I isolated him from the sheep last night,
placed before him faded grass, his last supper,
and left him out in the cold tied to a branch of a tree.
I remembered when he had tapped his forelegs on the ground
several times and thrust toward another ram,
and the locks of wool swayed on his belly and down the rear,
and the heads clashed.

I remembered when he had stood on the rocks,
the meadow lying below, the grass bending to the breeze,
and the shepherd urging him to move on.
The wind brushed his face and coat;
a chill swept through him despite his thick hair.

The ram is dragged to the cemented center
while a few girls carrying trays, gather for free meat,
a grapnel is hooked to the upper step of a ladder
bending against the wall,
and the knife in the butcher's hand is being honed.

The ram pulls back refusing to surrender his throat;
thousands like him on Mount Arafat are entangled in a tug of
war.

He is finally grappled to the ground,
and the legs are tied in pairs.

He carries the smell of ewes in his breath and wool.

In the silver edge of the knife, shines Abraham's smile;
in the bleat of the ram, reverberates Isaac's laughter.

The ram's eye stares; I see its look pierce my mind
as the knife swiftly cleaves the throat.

He kicks and jumps as if an electric current was fed into
him.

The blood first swishes, gurgles out, then dribbles...

The legs prance in the air at an incessantly slowing pace.

A quiver.. then a repose, he stops breathing.

Preying

I go out from this smothering dark house,
tasting the bitter dryness of my mouth.
Back in the kitchen, cold air
lay on the slates of the refrigerator
like pizza, like blocks of Cheddar cheese.
It stood like a gallon of milk, spiralled like eggs.

The grass outside has risen as high as my waist.
A snake moves at the edge of the grass
as his head drags the uncoiling black rings over the dirt.
A sparrow has swooped and landed on a stone not far off.
The snake continues his silent crawl in the bird's direction.
And as his head slides down the furrow,
the snake's neck writhes, making a loop;
his bifurcated tongue continually protrudes,
licking the dry sand as it aimlessly rolls and flows back,
and disappears inside the mouth.
I follow the snake from where I stand as if my head
worms along the dirt, as if I slither on my belly.

The snake's upper body lifts as if climbing the air;
his triangular head paralleling the ground.
The head snaps while the mouth opens, exhibiting the fangs;
the sparrow is bit and held firmly between the jaws.
Soft white feathers, the size of baked mushroom

are whittled and flung upward in a twinkle of the eye.
The snake clasps the bird tightly
inside rings which squeeze until the sparrow's body
is motionless and its peak is wide open.

The snake biting on his prey,
divides the grass,
leaving his trace as if the grass has been lashed.
Yet it seems the snake has crept to the wall
and vanished in a hole where the ground ends.
My bitter tongue rocks slowly sideways
as if waking.

Love Poem

The road before us at night,
a dark tongue sticking out
of the pressing fog and
licking us as we slide downhill in Tennessee,
reminds me:

when summer came
and you were twelve and I was thirteen,
the heat made wheat yellow,
grapes throb with juice.
Laden branches of apple trees bent
and dipped in the soil.
Fig fruit became soft;
honey drops clogged their pores.

1

We used to rise up with the sun.
Wearing your hat like a military pilot,
you knocked on the door and hurried me up.
We carried our straw baskets
and walked through the fog to the vineyards
for picking grapes.
Little clouds detached from the fog,
two or more collided and merged into one,
some others touched and flowed by.
I realized that my hand was pressing on yours,
keeping it in its cradle.

We exited from the fog;
our clothes absorbed the dew
as your breath was inhaled by mine and made me
warm.

Vines appeared: arms growing maple-like leaves,
stretching and resting on the ground.
The grapes at the bottom of a cluster in my hand
hang before my mouth
like your earlobes.
I unwound and stood in the fog, a naked spool.

2

Going to the field for harvest,
we rode on the thick bellied horse.
Your hands crossed each other around my waist.
Your head lay on my back,
listening to my pounding heartbeat.
The horse sucked the air into his engine,
and the sweat drenched his neck and belly.

Your hair, those brown fibers
falling below your back,
was blown in the air
like tongues of fire dancing away,
and leaving behind you
dry mouths and hearts of ashes.

Our sickles cut the stalks of wheat.
Your hands inflated like loaves
beginning to rise in the oven,
those hands made of flour and milk,
were the food for my eyes.
We wrapped the wheat in bundles,
and later stored the grain for winter.
There is no cold wind, thunder or rain now;
but I can see you through the fog lying on your side,
using your forearm as a pillow.

I tiptoed, approaching you like a shadow
so as not to disturb your eyelids.
Your breathing made the sound
of pigeons moving their webbed feet on cement.
I watched your breasts, the size of peaches,
rise and fall.

3

The sun appeared after the clouds split and the
rain stopped;
rocks, silver toes glared.
Our eyes blanked
as if we had stepped out of darkness into sunshine.
Your little feet, arched like my eyebrows,
stamped the grass;
their thudding fell softly into my ears.
I thought of licking the raindrops
off the combs of your feet

than plucking apples and figs.

I shut my eyes as my friend drives,
and dream of a woman like you
to be waiting for me where the fog ends.
That is, if it ever will.

Christmas Card

1

I am sending you this card.
The Christmas tree on its front, stands alone.
I remember last Christmas,
the short arm of the clock in the living room
turned perpendicularly upward,
the long one jumped every minute, approaching twelve.
I had left the porch light on.
But still you didn't press on the doorbell.
The falling snow made the sound
of the rustle of your shoes on the ground.
For a while, I thought I heard your footsteps.
I held my breath and listened; but their echo died away.
The seconds arm beat in my chest;
I counted many of the revolutions it made.

2

Your hair divided in the middle,
sloped sideways down below your ears
where you had tied it together with a green ribbon
which I unbound, and the hair uncoiled and fell.
Your face pushed against my chest
through my hands that slid away from the part
as if combing your hair as slowly as
snow piled on sidewalks.
We sat in our birthday suits by the Christmas tree

from which ornaments hung like apples.

There was no sound around

except the purring of my cat who curled up herself
in a corner of the couch; her belly pumping in and out.

Our tongues shoveled into our mouths
the warmth off our skin.

I stare at the green ornaments on the card.

I feel I am hanging like them
trying to reach down for your fingers.

Moving Out

We are in a plane
hit by a lightning bolt.
The engines on the left wing are engulfed by fire.
An emergency landing?
It'll be too late!
The plane losing its balance
diving rapidly,
we must abandon it before we crash.
You jump out of the emergency door
without waiting for me to buckle on my parachute.

Parachuting,
we are carried apart by the wind,
and farther down, the heavy rain
blots out our view of one another.
You land on the grass,
unstrap the belt
and slide the parachute jacket off your arms and back;
I am still parachuting down.

You throw your clothes piece after piece in an old suitcase
and leave the white kitten statue you gave me
on the TV set.
You tuck the small bottle of Chanel perfume in your handbag
and begin moving your boxes out.

I don't want you to wait till I wear my parachute,
till my feet hit the ground
and search together for a house, a road,
a gas station or a shelter;
but before slamming the door behind you
I have hoped you'd hear me say,
I still love you!

Kiss

Stroking your mouth
with my tongue
like a fish flicking its tail
as it glides in an aquarium,
I am licking the insides
of a honeycomb.

Failing to Score

I insert the quarter in the slot of a Pinball machine,
and press the red button with the tip of my thumb.
A silver ball jumps like a kernel of popcorn,
and rests between the lips of the rubber
as your breasts used to fall in my hands.
I pull the handle, stretching the spring, and shoot.
The ball climbs the ramp, heading toward the area between
Dolly Parton's legs
who stands on the facade tossing her huge chest,
challenging me with a seducing smile.
The ball curves!
It bumps one of the red knobs at the mouth of the board.
It bounces back, and the knob flashes;
the numbers on Dolly's diaphragm roll,
registering how much Dolly's flesh
has responded to my tantalization.
The ball whirs slowly between the knobs,
sliding toward the hole between my arms.
I push a side button,
and one of the flippers kicks upward the ball
which dashes and sits in a side-crater.
Immediately Dolly's muscles palpitate.
The red spots fixed to the board in the size of thumbnails,
flash one after the other.
And the numbers tick and tick as they roll.

The ball ejects, rushing toward the hole,
but the flipper boots it again upward.
I shake the machine so that the ball stays
behind the knobs as it hits them and rebounds.
The machine tilts, the lights disappear,
and Dolly's smile fades.

We sleep at night, facing the mirror in the ceiling.
We see our lips move, but we can hardly hear one another.

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