

## The Night the Castle Came Tumbling Down

The king left long ago.  
We had a president in the castle who freed  
himself from the monarchy's past.  
Then the castle came tumbling down  
with the first perfect strike of a war plane.

The president was shot, his wife  
and daughters raped, the children were not spared.  
A hundred years of solid concrete collapsed  
within itself.

As we stepped into the castle, murdered women's lingerie  
hung on a wire rope extending across the living room.  
Little silverware was left, most already stolen  
through night and into morning.

My brother and I walked into the castle.  
I looked up to him and asked what this all meant.  
Who are we now? The king is gone and his predecessor, too.  
A large carpet lay on the entrance of the castle doors imprinted with the president's face.

People casually walked all over it, some even wiping their feet.  
I went around the carpet.  
He was our last hope for freedom.  
Nothing was ever going to be the same.  
Our descent into hell had just begun.

## Of Goddesses

Grandma you were sold  
to a man far away from the city  
into a village unknown to you.  
Those precious mountains  
and blue rivers didn't matter to you  
anymore.

Mother you were raped as a child bride.  
Auntie at the age of thirteen you were  
raped many times until you produced  
a baby.

Who rapes a Goddess?  
Who then dares to ask them for babies?  
Who commands them to be silent?  
Who lashes them one hundred  
times and expects silence?  
Who expects them to go back to the mosque  
to pray to God and bow down again?  
Who demands they keep praying on the *tasbih*  
and beg for mercy?  
Who tells them to believe in man and nothing  
else?

## Red Sky

The red sky settled into pitch black slowly.  
My mother said the sky turned  
red because that was how many of us died today,  
in a city no longer belonging to us.

But for tonight we rested, too tired to pray.  
We were used to red skies.  
Flames from houses and stores burned from the bombs.  
Hundreds or maybe thousands of our countrymen and women perished.  
Smell of burned bodies and buildings  
covered the air.

I was sure that God was crying for us, for the living and the dead,  
but he was helpless, too, and couldn't save us.  
We slowly wasted away; neighbors turned on each other.  
A list of young men's names taken from their homes  
or classroom quickly added up like an equation  
outside the prison walls.

My mother kept her eyes on that list every day  
to see if my brother's name was added as one of the dead.  
I kept my eyes on the sky and waited to see if it turned redder than usual.  
Then I would know my brother was gone—  
and we'd be right behind.