

ACROSS THE EAST RIVER

What is night
if not a sprawling shadow?

The split leaves,
the curve of them, slick

and warm, under this air
that lives in your crevices

and mine. How the same air
has touched both of us, laces

its fingers in ours. The bridge
is lit up. In this night of still water,

it is all there is.

BEFORE HE SINNED

After the sky was wedded
to the earth it turned
by degrees
into fire,
char and smoke.

The gods, unmoving,
watched this dawn
and lusted.

REVOLUTION

When at last
she began to burn,

he turned back
into himself,

slow as cold snaking
into a fold of cloth.

For too long
she had held his sky—

any longer,
and he would lose

himself.

So he turned
from her,

walked away
from the horizon,

from its glowing water
as the sun lay

smothered
in a pool of red.

ON COURTING CALAMITY

after N.M. Rashed

A thread
from pre-
eternity
to past time's
end, a thread
that binds
movement
to gesture, a crow
to a narcissus.

I stretch.

My waist, this morning,
is a knot.

THE ROSE THE FLAME THE HUNTER

We are all the same woman— with silver hands
and eyes of gold, cracking the earth
softly with our petals.

All love songs are about me
and you. Men stand with fistfuls

of buds, waiting to strew them at our feet,
holy like an endless stream of water.

Sometimes they wander intoxicated
to the tavern, reciting verses

of our cruelty, clipped of their wings,
songs of exaltation and grief.

Their sorrow is beautiful,
but the rose has not learned

to move or be moved.

Friends, have you learned?
We are mirrors.

All they want is to see themselves.
All we want is to bloom.

THE BRANCH

Majnoon, his collar sewn,
returns to the city.

He scatters the petals of roses, dark
like the horizon.

In the courtyard, a child eats dust.

ON THE FERRY

how many lights are poets,

their yellow-white suns

leaning over

each wave of the river

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