

Marsiya

(after Anila Agha's *All the Flowers are for Me*)

- I. A metal box
casts shadows—casts you
into the vast beyond—

We pressed a button, turned it on—
the machine drew in the box
of you for cremation

- II. Memory: you preparing sharbat
in a tall, thin glass—green khus

green heat, your white starched
collar wilted. It doesn't taste

the way you remember. I insist
it's delicious—as many times as I dare

- III. Top floor of the museum—
blond, pine floors
rectangular room, empty

except for the metal box
with a single bulb inside—

swooping cut out design—
squares, circles, kashish, floral motif
petal and vine, down-stroke, do cashmi he

- IV. Memory: your palms rubbing together
polished as river stone—

keeping my hands warm
in the cage made between them

V. Memory: when you lay in your last bed
you made the same haunted sounds
in your sleep that woke me as a child

it seemed impossible that images
of trains, the street on fire
shouting mouths and stains, faces

you would never see again
were casting shadows
on the wall of your sleeping brain

after eighty blurred years, that now
I could comfort the child
you were

VI. In the room with the box
and the light, one person
after another is made beautiful

by all the shadow-flowers—
by delight—crossing
their faces

VII. How simple it is to make a space
holy. A bed and a chair beside it
a metal box and a source of light

VIII. Memory: Dilwara Mandir. Red Fort.
Humayun's Tomb. Every earring
hanging from a loved aunt's ear. Every

dupatta's embroidery. Every
garden we roamed together laughing
doves roosting in dry fountains

IX. The past. The present. Which
is the lightbulb? Which is the metal
box feathering shadows across my face?

X. Suffering: it is briefly
unbearable, then all

logistics. Roll the body
this way, then that. Wash

the sheet. Remake
the bed with the body

still in it. Some angels
Some angles. Some

materials make
it easier

XI. The carved shapes make
what would otherwise be harsh
light exquisite.

I've seen the sun burn white
all over the birches

XII. Marsiya. Elegy. A box
installed for softening
the unbearable sun

XIII. What should I do now without you?
What should I do? Without you
Without you. What now?

XIV. Memory: you loved pie. Apple pie
ala mode. I can see
the delight on your face

ordering it. Eating it.
That most American
sweetness.

Light across the wall of your face
what could I have done
to make it last? A light goes

XV. on and off with the switch—
I held your hand as though

it were your life, the light
of you laughing at your own
good joke—

XVI. The summer calls us
to be flowers, birds swooping in the light.
You began to work at dying

when everything that can bloom does.
I'd step outside and the blooming
world felt fake—lovely

cut-out shapes. Flowered sheets
of your bed seemed real.
You were gone by September—

XVII. September shadows were lengthening.
Is every shadow a mourning,
a memory stretching out in its bed?

XVIII. There is a box that casts shadows.
There is a box made by walls, ceiling, floor
on which the shadows fall.

I will live as long with your shadow
as I lived with you. A shadow
is not an insubstantial thing

XIX. Memory: one failed paratha
after another. No one could convince you
otherwise. No matter how happily we ate.

I see now that you were flattening shadows
with the little wooden rolling pin.
Tasting shadows too hot from the pan

XX. What can I say about the space
between an object and its shadow?
Every shadow is more beautiful

when it rests briefly
on your face

XXI. Memory: flying a kite—
your hands
over my hands on the string.

Your voice in my ear. Tug it in, let it go.
The paper diamond blocking the sun.
Me running after the tail's long shadow

XXII. Me running after the tail's long shadow

XXIII. Is every shadow a shape for time?

XXIV. Is every father a shadow to chase?

XXV. Is every father's hand a shadow crossing a face?
What am I to do?

XXVI. Memory: You sitting up in bed
wanting pizza, paratha, chicken soup,
which you could no longer eat.

It made us both happy
for me to cook dish after dish,
to lift the spoon carefully to your lips

XXVII. The room fills with people
turning to each other in shadow
and light.

The room fills with your shadow,
history repeats and repeats
its patterns

XXVIII. The museum is a box
filled with shadow

with spaces
between an object and its shadow.

Your death made a museum
out of me. I needed

your hand again today. I studied the object
of my own palm. I held it up,
held it out, watching

myself recast as you
without you, everything

blooming new petals, new leaves
on the wall, on the floor of me.