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## Three Poems

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## AID-EL-KEBIR

It is the feast of killing sheep.  
Small boys with buckets of coal come  
and build hot fires.

It is a day of sudden sounds—  
High torn bleating and someone chanting.  
The wind drops.

It is a day of smoke and fire.  
The killer sharpens knives in the  
Early morning.  
On a streetcorner  
He shows his son how.

It is the feast of killing sheep.  
Small boys with braziers of coal begin  
To char the heads.

Sometimes they roll them—the brittle  
Ash breaks off. Some wrap the entrails  
Around their arms

Or swing them like wet rope. The mute  
Black noses point Allah-wards. The red  
Wool forms carpet.  
The coals in the dirt  
Are white sheep eyes.

In the innermost courts the families  
Sit with the smell of pure flesh.  
The prayers settle

All night. Stars pass over the city  
All night, the rooftops are silent  
And the moon full.

Colors separate towards morning.  
Coals crumble in the new light.

1225 B.C.

There was sensible terror  
When the river turned rank.  
The ornamented fish  
And the long limbed birds  
Faltered and fell motionless  
In our nets.  
We could not drink the water  
For it spawned frogs  
And the night air  
Was full and loathsome  
With their sounds.  
The flies,  
Like vats of black dye  
Loosened into the sky,  
Goaded the goats and cattle  
Who ran wild  
In the wilting yellow fields.  
The dead stank while  
We sat inspecting our lives;  
Then all clean flesh  
Festered and we seemed  
Ourselves to be dying.  
Some men walked unharmed  
And said sticks would turn  
To snakes in their hands,  
But I never saw it.  
A great hail ruined the grain.  
Darkness came. The city  
Vibrated with laments;  
Parents ran into the streets  
With their heavy dead,  
Their dearest first-born sons.  
The days dawned expertly  
On the empty land  
And those still alive

Were greatly changed.  
The waters cleared and the wind  
Moved. But few knew  
What wretched schemes  
We had been so firmly caught in.

## PEOPLE FROM YOUR JAW

I know it's only what holds teeth and keeps  
the mouth from falling open stupidly  
but I've seen your jaw  
on other faces looking gritted  
and unnatural like that last day,  
like it was wired after a fall  
like Ann-Margret who ate liquefied pizza  
for 3 months until hers healed,  
that was in Las Vegas.

Some look like they ache  
like your jaw that last day  
like it had been used to beat people with,  
literally, as in two battles  
I remember offhand, Samson  
winging them right and left  
and Molly Seagrim laying them low,  
that was England and Israel  
which used to be Palestine;  
I still wear old coins we bought there  
you made them into something  
to hang on me.

What I see is not just your jawline  
but I x-ray in to the bone,  
white, shapely, thin,  
like you were that last day  
and I think I could carve it  
into a flute to accompany you  
when you play viola—  
it fits up tightly under your chin.  
I could play tree leaves,  
you could play pathos unless  
you preferred myth and pagan  
culture. After listening

I could put the flute away,  
the case slides into a breast pocket,  
and go into the street like that last day  
taking only what allows me to create  
people from your jaw, like from someone's rib,  
and to take small pleasure in it.