

After the Transformation, Leader says, in the Land of Dragons, we will have no races no creeds no tribes only one nation **The Nation of Dragons**, he says no genders and we will be ageless, sexless. His sweat falls from his top lip into my mouth. We will be one nation, Leader says, and pushes further into me, more of himself than is himself. Inside I moan no no no more. My mouth does not betray me. My mouth knows its place and moans yes yes yes. Inside I remember the fields of sunflowers. Inside I remember my own name. The outside world is lost to me. I gasp and gasp and gasp. Leader buries my mouth with his mouth. He pushes ahead and calls upon himself: Dragon Dragon Dragon

We return to **the field of buried clothes** and find a cemetery of sunflowers yellows speckled and browned faces blackened necks broken broken their drooping browned manes stagger in their stooping unerect they reach for somewhere where are they us they are us we lean towards them we lean towards ourselves necks broken faces burnt arms drooping our souls one mildewed crown the buried clothes beneath them evidence of a war lost

We are born with spinning coins in place of eyes to save our people we must take them to the places where **they are no one** where they can be washed clean **they are reborn** and reborn again and again with *my* burning palm raising memories spinning the darkness of your pasts away *my* fingertips are coins pressed into your temples & cheeks & jaws I am in your bodies now I claim *my* place as the blood & veins & arteries of your salvation I am the marrow & bone that holds you upright I am your salvation

This story ends in despair in death in the dusted end called the end the spark is snuffed out and what's up there is the end and the end and the end of the end

I will die as young as any other man who has ambition. I will die with thirty pieces of silver in my mouth. I will die with gold coins on my eyes. I will die with no hunger ...no hunger. I will die filled and flesh-clean ...lithe. Leader will call me Traitor ...Judas. I will call him Liar. Dragon. Skins made of pounded copper flattened gold mica stolen from lands he called Empty of People. People, Leader said, have Souls. And all Souls Follow Leader. We killed those who refused to flee and **Leader called us Holy Warriors**. We drank the blood warm from the dying bodies we crushed their bones and fed on their marrow ...Dragons, Leader said, we'll all be Dragons ... Too many unrecorded years have come and gone and I am no longer the boy raked from the trash. I am a man. I never believed in Dragons. I am a Man. Leader may no longer eat from my flesh. I am a Man. I will die covered in my sins. I will die a Man. I will die with no shame. I will die a Man. I am a Man. I never believed in Dragons.

What is the light in the dark Everywhere these days someone it seems is trying to bring the light of night inside Drapes of bulbed light tacked to walls Lights hanging by nails punched in the ceilings There are dozens of paper moons here An opening at top and bottom to insert another fake star Where is it we each need to go Away from the darkness Away from the darkness We find **false light** to **take us away from the darkness**

The lack of constellations must be a relief/comfort to those who do not know how to read the sky The sky is filled with anguish That is all we ever need to know To escape the darkness look at the light punctured in the sky The lights of anguish

The Story of Death

Once upon a time there lived a young woman who wanted more than anything in the world for Death. She had tried many times to call Death, created many spells and many chants, lit many candles and buried many stones. She had sacrificed the family dog, too, or so she thought, but the morning after she pierced his throat with her father's favorite carving knife, the dog was sitting with the morning paper, speckled with blood, on the front stoop. She had stolen two entire chickens from her neighbor's lawn and carried each to the park, choking their necks all the way, then threw them, one after the other, onto a pile of whiskey-soaked newspaper and clothes she no longer wished to wear. When she left the park, the chickens wearily marched behind her, clucking their disapproval of being carried so far away from home.

She wanted Death so badly that she helped the doula and midwife deliver her mother's new baby, so she could chant a death spell during the delivery. The baby breached, yes, then spilled out, wide lung'd and heavy. Now, the child sat on her legs, yelling *giddy-up*, hitting her with a belt she used weeks ago to hang, unsuccessfully, the family cat.

Just yesterday she tried again to slice her own wrists, then she put a gun against her temple and pulled the trigger, her body already loaded down with pills promised to bring about death, swallowed with her mother's illegally obtained moonshine, a liquor the locals said would put a hole in your gut. She woke the next morning muddle-headed and stiff-mouthed, a bullet hole neatly widening the bathroom wall, her gut wonky, but hole-free. Death eluded her and she so longed for him and his heavy silk coat, embroidered with bright red velvet stitching. She longed to examine his brilliant red smooth fedora, to finger the long obsidian feather she'd heard was given to him, fresh every morning, from a very large raven that had cast a spell in its feathers to keep Death at bay. So many had cast spells to keep Death from their doorstep but she wanted Death close. What else could protect her from the boys who hounded her on her walks to and from school? Her mother promised her that the boys would grow out of it, as had her father, but she had yet to tell them about the touchings. So desperate to be let alone, she would even take Death's lesser beings, the many smaller deaths that would eventually get her closer and closer to Death. But Death and Death refused her.

& then she grew older and met the man the people called Leader. Then she begged for Death's mercy & begged & begged & begged.