

The Lives of Cells

*Kurdish teenager, 17, stoned to death in
honor killing by her family near Mosul*

I

And so
in the cool static rift of a charged particle
we once came, this *uniformity of the earth's life*
(ours) explained by a blue lightning bolt of gods
entering some languishing primitive cell,
sparking it into mitosis, and, sexless, the cell
ever dividing into daughter and daughter,
 into stone, into peacock, into angels of light

 —all we have
become, or will be—

II

 and now this girl,
the naked lily-stem of her legs
against her torn black clothes, startling
even here on the evening news,
 her battered face on the television screen
 —what we want to call *flower*—
the trembling shade beneath our pale, reflected ones,
her shirt red or bloodied
 and the little staccato of stones at her head—

III

 as if she were about our own daughters,
the wind just now barely channeling through the dark
labyrinths of their young bodies, their simple emptiness wanting what?
 love rain cry of birds the first touch
of male palm against the budding nipple
 what the living cell evolves for.

IV

When her father who said *Kill her Stone her*
touched her harshly as he must have that first time
before her leaving for the boy—his hand
that once held her mother, her nipples between his teeth
gentled the way mine were, his seed/your seed
following the old genetic pathways
the way seed does—

the torn tissue of its blossoming
even in that cell's first dividing
already ordained toward sky
as the blind root splits the holy clay—

V

did his daughter, tricked home by him,
missing him I think the way daughters do,
already know the ending of this story,
know what love can bring, has brought, the way Lot's wife did—
that one last forbidden look back
and her feet already crumbling into the shackling salt --

VI

In a marketplace somewhere near Mosul
this dénouement: how many men with stones
striking her, striking that dark fragile place,
their birthplace stripped visible now, gossamer of all the fallen women--

that bald vaginal star of our newborn daughters
that appears to us each time on this earth like
first memory, like first thought, first desire when the biblical rib
snapped clean and our wild paradise, ignorant and beautiful,
faltered

Winner of the 2011 Chautauqua War and Peace Poetry Contest