

Chagall Village #16

We remember the village. The men with beards
and violins, snow enameling domed churches.
A woman on a bridge with a felt hat and rouge.
Her mouth tastes of onions and blueberries.
Then the cemetery under a complex sky
cut into molecules and cubes, spasms of rain falling
like an inverted ocean on the sable-haired young wife.
She will drink absinthe, be unfaithful, read novels
in French, I can tell. And sheep, the white horses
like lawn ornaments, the reek of pig meat, and fields
deep as down quilt comforters and winter sleep.

The man with a pole and two pails. The Jew in red.
Bananas on a cloth like mated canaries. We remember
in primary colors, our pastel loves and oily hates.
It is before proportion, mortality and heartbreak.
Coherence is incidental. We float between spires
holding hands and gravity is intermittent. We know
this landscape of adolescence. Before we could spell
betrayal and vengeance. Before we were abandoned
ravenous and alone. The goat hanging by her
hooves upside down the wood blood bucket.
Houses like movie sets inhabited by insomniacs.

When father talked, we stared at the floor and saw
naked women and sailboats. Strata overlap. They can't
put border guards in each room, riverbank and plaza.

Summer mother, an enormous freckled peach, whispers
lies moist and specific enough to ruin a life. Father
smells sick and dangerous, virulent and contagious,
his cigarettes secret citadels in the dark. He's a heathen
with a yarmulke and bad grammar. He can grunt,
plaster walls, hammer and eat last weeks borsht.
I wouldn't want to meet him at midnight. Flannel
and ash, train stubs in his pockets, lottery
tickets, racetrack bets. I wet the bed, wind
stained from nicotine, urine and kerosene.

Where we they going between cataclysms,
clawing at air they poisoned with their mouths,
leaving their shouts in the creek, their vulgar hand

gestures and curses, their stolen stale black breads?

The barber said they soiled his scissors with lice.
The baker wouldn't give them credit. Even the rabbi
didn't visit, claimed he had priorities and migraines.
They couldn't learn geometry, how to swim or stop at
red lights, where the Danube was. When the barn burned
they sat in a ravine for years like chained dogs.

I collect village graveyards like some women do coins
or stamps. I walk in high heels on grass, deliberately
drilling my stilettos in, hoping to induce nightmares
and round wounds which might fester and spread.
For this, I would shave my head, fast and pray.

It's the same old story. Talk of abandoning the capital.
Famine. Malaria. Contagion in the river.
They're shooting dogs and women again.
The village, brick and stick, is gone.