Ghazal: The Dark Times

Marilyn Hacker, 1942

Tell us that line again, the thing about the dark times…  
“When the dark times come, we will sing about the dark times.”  
  
They’ll always be wrong about peace when they’re wrong about justice…  
Were you wrong, were you right, insisting about the dark times?  
  
The traditional fears, the habitual tropes of exclusion  
Like ominous menhirs, close into their ring about the dark times.  
  
Naysayers in sequins or tweeds, libertine or ascetic  
Find a sensual frisson in what they’d call bling about the dark times.  
  
Some of the young can project themselves into a Marshall Plan future  
Where they laugh and link arms, reminiscing about the dark times.  
  
From every spot-lit glitz tower with armed guards around it  
Some huckster pronounces his fiats, self-sacralized king, about the dark

times.  
  
In a tent, in a queue, near barbed wire, in a shipping container,  
Please remember ya akhy, we too know something about the dark times.  
  
Sindbad’s roc, or Ganymede’s eagle, some bird of rapacious ill omen  
From bleak skies descends, and wraps an enveloping wing about the dark

times.  
  
You come home from your meeting, your clinic, make coffee and look in the

mirror  
And ask yourself once more what you did to bring about the dark times.

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Even the Rain

Agha Shahid Ali, 1949 – 2001

What will suffice for a true-love knot? Even the rain?

But he has bought grief’s lottery, bought even the rain.

“Our glosses / wanting in this world”—“Can you remember?”

Anyone!—“when we thought / the poets taught” even the rain?

After we died—That was it!—God left us in the dark.

And as we forgot the dark, we forgot even the rain.

Drought was over. Where was I? Drinks were on the house.

For mixers, my love, you’d poured—what?—even the rain.

Of this pear-shaped orange’s perfumed twist, I will say:

Extract Vermouth from the bergamot, even the rain.

How did the Enemy love you—with earth? air? and fire?

He held just one thing back till he got even: the rain.

This is God’s site for a new house of executions?

You swear by the Bible, Despot, even the rain?

After the bones—those flowers—this was found in the urn:

The lost river, ashes from the ghat, even the rain.

What was I to prophesy if not the end of the world?

A salt pillar for the lonely lot, even the rain.

How the air raged, desperate, streaming the earth with flames—

To help burn down my house, Fire sought even the rain.

He would raze the mountains, he would level the waves;

he would, to smooth his epic plot, even the rain.

New York belongs at daybreak to only me, just me—

To make this claim Memory’s brought even the rain.

They’ve found the knife that killed you, but whose prints are these?

No one has such small hands, Shahid, not even the rain.

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