

LOOK

Solmaz Sharif

poems

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Contents

I.

LOOK • 3

II.

BATTLEFIELD ILLUMINATION • 9

PINPOINT TARGET • 10

LAY • 11

CONTAMINATED REMAINS • 12

SAFE HOUSE • 13

DECEPTION STORY • 15

SPECIAL EVENTS FOR HOMELAND SECURITY • 17

Dear INTELLIGENCE JOURNAL, • 18

FREE MAIL • 19

FORCE VISIBILITY • 21

BREAK-UP • 24

GROUND VISIBILITY • 28

DESIRED APPRECIATION • 30

Inspiration Point, Berkeley • 31

DEPENDERS/IMMEDIATE FAMILY • 33

STATELESS PERSON • 35

FAMILY OF SCATTERABLE MINES • 38

MASTER FILM • 39

EXPellee • 40

Mess Hall • 41

THEATER • 42

Soldier, Home Early, Surprises His Wife in Chick-fil-A • 43

VULNERABILITY STUDY • 44

Reaching Guantánamo • 45

III.

PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT • 55

PERSONAL EFFECTS • 56

CODA

DRONE • 89

Notes • 95

Acknowledgments • 97

look — (*) In mine warfare, a period during which a mine circuit is receptive of an influence.

Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms
United States Department of Defense

LOOK

It matters what you call a thing: *Exquisite* a lover called me.
Exquisite.

Whereas *Well, if I were from your culture, living in this country,*
said the man outside the 2004 Republican National
Convention, *I would put up with that for this country;*

Whereas I felt the need to clarify: *You would put up with*
TORTURE, *you mean* and he proclaimed: *Yes;*

Whereas what is your life;

Whereas years after they LOOK down from their jets
and declare my mother's Abadan block PROBABLY
DESTROYED, we walked by the villas, the faces
of buildings torn off into dioramas, and recorded it
on a handheld camcorder;

Whereas it could take as long as 16 seconds between
the trigger pulled in Las Vegas and the Hellfire missile
landing in Mazar-e-Sharif, after which they will ask
Did we hit a child? No. A dog. they will answer themselves;

Whereas the federal judge at the sentencing hearing said
I want to make sure I pronounce the defendant's name
correctly;

Whereas this lover would pronounce my name and call me
Exquisite and lay the floor lamp across the floor,
softening even the light;

Whereas the lover made my heat rise, rise so that if heat
sensors were trained on me, they could read
my THERMAL SHADOW through the roof and through
the wardrobe;

Whereas *you know we ran into like groups like mass executions. w/ hands tied behind their backs. and everybody shot in the head side by side. its not like seeing a dead body walking to the grocery store here. its not like that. its iraq you know its iraq. its kinda like acceptable to see that there and not—it was kinda like seeing a dead dog or a dead cat lying—;*

Whereas I thought if he would LOOK at my exquisite face or my father's, he would reconsider;

Whereas *You mean I should be disappeared because of my family name?* and he answered *Yes. That's exactly what I mean,* adding that his wife helped draft the PATRIOT Act;

Whereas the federal judge wanted to be sure he was pronouncing the defendant's name correctly and said he had read all the exhibits, which included the letter I wrote to cast the defendant in a loving light;

Whereas today we celebrate things like his transfer to a detention center closer to home;

Whereas his son has moved across the country;

Whereas I made nothing happen;

Whereas *ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life?* It is even a THERMAL SHADOW, it appears so little, and then vanishes from the screen;

Whereas I cannot control my own heat and it can take as long as 16 seconds between the trigger, the Hellfire missile, and *A dog.* they will answer themselves;

Whereas *A dog.* they will say: Now, therefore,

Let it matter what we call a thing.

Let it be the exquisite face for at least 16 seconds.

Let me LOOK at you.

Let me LOOK at you in a light that takes years to get here.

II.

During the war, we felt the silence in the policy of the governments of English-speaking countries. That policy was to win the war first, and work out the meanings afterward. The result was, of course, that the meanings were lost.

—MURIEL RUKEYSER

BATTLEFIELD ILLUMINATION on fire
a body running

PINPOINT TARGET one lit desk lamp
and a nightgown walking past the window

LAY down
to sleep then
to rest last night
to waste before
across a stretcher
across a shoulder
over a leg
beneath an arm
in a shroud
in a crib
on top of a car
chained to a bumper
beneath a bridge
in town square
in the fountain
in the Tigris
under water boiled from smart bombs
in a cellar
in backseat counting streetlamps strobing overhead
under bomblets
under tendrils of phosphorus
in a burnt silhouette
on a cot
under a tent
still holding your breath
beneath dining table
beneath five stories
in a hole

CONTAMINATED REMAINS wash hands before getting in bed
leave interrogation room before answering cell
teach your mouth to say
honey when you enter the kitchen

DAMAGE AREA does not include night sweats
or retching at the smell of barbeque

DEAD SPACE fridges full
after the explosion the hospital
places body parts
out back where crowds
attempt to identify those
who do not answer their calls
by an eyeball
a sleeve of a favorite shirt
a stopped wristwatch

DESTRUCTION RADIUS limited to blast site
and not the brother abroad
who answers his phone
then falls against the counter
or punches a cabinet door

SAFE HOUSE

SANCTUARY where we don't have to

SANITIZE hands or words or knives, don't have to use a

SCALE each morning, worried we take up too much space. I

SCAN my memory of baba talking on

SCREEN answering a question (*how are you?*) I would ask and ask from
behind the camera, his face changing with each repetition as he tried to
watch the football game. He doesn't know this is the beginning of my

SCRIBING life: repetition and change. A human face at the seaport and a
home growing smaller. Let's

SEARCH my father's profile: moustache black and holding back a

SECRET he still hasn't told me,

SECTION of the couch that's fallen a bit from his repeated weight,

SECTOR of the government designed to keep him from flying. He kept our
house

SECURE except from the little bugs that come with dried herbs from Iran.
He gives

SECURITY officers a reason to get off their chairs. My father is not afraid of

SEDITION. He can

SEIZE a wild pigeon off a Santa Monica street or watch

SEIZURES unfold in his sister's bedroom—the FBI storming through. He
said *use wood sticks to hold up your protest signs then use them in*

SELF-DEFENSE *when the horses come*, his eyes

SENSITIVE when he passes advice to me, like I'm his

SEQUEL, like we're all a

SERIAL caught on Iranian satellite TV. When you tell someone off, he calls it

SERVICING. When I stand on his feet, I call it

SHADOWING. He naps in the afternoon and wakes with

SHEETLINES on his face, his hair upright, the sound of

SHELLS (SPECIFY)—the sound of mussel shells on the lip of the Bosphorus
crunching beneath his feet. He's given me

SHELTER and

SHIELDING, shown it's better to travel away from the

SHOAL. *Let them follow you* he says from somewhere in Los Angeles waiting
for me. If he feels a

SHORT FALL he doesn't tell me about it.

DECEPTION STORY

Friends describe my DISPOSITION

as stoic. *Like a dead fish*, an ex said. DISTANCE

is a funny drug and used to make me a DISTRESSED PERSON,

one who cried in bedrooms and airports. Once I bawled so hard at the
border, even the man with the stamps and holster said *Don't cry. You'll be
home soon*. My DISTRIBUTION

over the globe debated and set to quota. A nation can only handle so many
of me. DITCHING

class, I break into my friend's dad's mansion and swim in the Beverly Hills
pool in a borrowed T-shirt. A brief DIVERSION.

My body breaking the chlorinated surface makes it, momentarily, my
house, my DIVISION

of driveway gate and alarm codes, my dress-rehearsed DOCTRINE

of pool boys and ping-pong and water delivered on the backs of sequined
Sparkletts trucks. *Over here*, DOLLY,

an agent will call out, then pat the hair at your hot black DOME.

After explaining what she will touch, *backs of the hands at the breasts and
buttocks*, the hand goes inside my waistband and my heart goes DORMANT.

A dead fish. The last *female assist* I decided to hit on. My life in the American
Dream is a DOWNGRADE,

a mere DRAFT

Notes

Terms appearing in small caps are taken from the United States Department of Defense's *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* as amended through October 17, 2007. As a supplement to standard English dictionaries (e.g., Merriam-Webster), this military dictionary is updated regularly, often monthly, with unclassified terms being added and subtracted as needed. Need is determined by a combination of factors, including military usage, presence of the term in standard English, etc. For example, the term "drone" appeared in the 2007 version, but no longer appears in the 2015 version. It is likely "drone" was removed from the dictionary since understanding of the term has fully entered English vernacular; in other words, the military definition is no longer a *supplement* to the English language, but the English language itself. Given the impossibility of keeping up with changes in the dictionary, I have used the October 17, 2007, edition throughout. This edition has over 5,900 terms, only a fraction of which appear in these poems. Some of the terms that do not appear here despite my efforts include:

absolute dud; beaten zone; crush depth; dazzle; enemy combatant; force beddown; guinea-pig; half-life; imitative communications deception; Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communication System; kite; light damage; minefield lane; nuisance minefield; operational art; proper authority; rainfall (nuclear); religious support; salted weapon; touchdown zone; unwarned exposed; very seriously ill or injured; war game; weapons of mass destruction; zone of action; zone of fire

The line *una a una tu cara en todos los buses urbanos* in "DRONE" is taken from Leonel Rugama's "Epitafio."