

I
THE WINGLESS PHOENIX

He lay
still
quiet, not moving
the hairs on his face alive
mists of snow dripping from his nose and chin
covering him like white, crystal ashes
only his head protruded from the prayer shawl
rapping his cold body
I expected him to shiver
and blow frosty air from his nostrils
his eyes closed
his lips slightly pursed as if trying to speak
as if he would reach for one last breath
trying to scream
to finally say those last things
that we never say when alive

coffin of fine woods
no metals for the dead Jew
just the clear shine of hand-carved sapwoods
cool to the eye
glistening darkness in the chilled night
a warm, tightly fitting glove
holding him in its artificial womb
broken only by the whispering of the cooling winds
keeping him asleep with its soothing lullabies
as if the winds were to stop their verse
he would leap from his birth and live again
wingless and ground born

I quietly anticipate his flight.

II
THE SINGING SILENCE

then came the morning hymns
chanting ditties to the budding flora
reaching their long limbs to the sky
young, flexing muscles
the clouds accompanied with its serenading landscape
of chirps and girgles

Velvet Glaciers

Written by Burton Beerman

covering the earth with its shadow
of silent song
warm in its coolness
like the dancing liquid flowing from a young mother's womb
sprouts jumped into the coffin
wrapping my brother's body with its gentle clutch
whispering into his ear its life sapping drone
that echoed into the air
prancing with the newly born sun rays
ever so carefully tickling the flesh of his ears
and the tone of the cool morning air
the silent sounds wailed
at once in rejoice and mourning
in the growing light
his lifeless body wingless and ground born
I quietly
patiently
anticipate his flight.

III MOURNING SONGS II

Lost my father
Without the Jew's mourning ways
only my inner heart sang the kaddish
Each passing day
My life filled with the butting chests of males
Blowing steam from their nostrils
Trying to eat my flesh
Inside I wept
Floundering in the viscous sea
Like a fish that hasn't been taught to swim
Then
As my brother died
I lost another.

IV THE DANCE

Then the dancing
the parade insidiously leaks into day
with prancing children
grandchildren, ancestors, great-grand children
singly and in hoards
taunting death

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with their understated sway
refusing to let the dying sleep
swing arm in arm
in jigs and horas
shouting a challenge
to the silent night
embarrassing the dead
with spirit thick with blood
they touch and sashay
with one communal step

I blink
and they are there
I rub confused eyes
and they are gone
but I hear them
to my knees
then rise
like a newly born pony shivers to foot
balancing large body
on his spindly legs
in the growing light
I look down upon my brother's lifeless body
and angrily
await his flight

V WORDS WITHOUT SONG

death causes feelings
life wouldn't answer
yearning for discovery
for the secrets locked
in the stillness
tightly latched
in the confines of his fate
I reach out
into the naked night
and remember
all the moments
without warrior's spirit
to act
awaiting my turn
breathing
in rhythm with the calmness
as the silence sings

I hear nothing
but feel so much of the unexplained.

VI DREAMS

children play
children's ways
in their world without beginning or end
as fateless as a small puppy
seriously romp
boundless and hungry
for means
that only forever brings
his birthing mother died
my brother never trusted again
taking his breaths through straws
and his loving through armor
his games
no longer children's things.

VII MORNING SONGS II

first I lost my father
but didn't know Jew's way to mourn
then I lost my brother
now know even less
frosty air from my nostrils
trying to be in tune
with the winds
singing out of tune quietly
i grieve with my own song
and await the first soothing promise
of the coming morning
from the darkness of the chilling night
as assuredly as my brother's body slowly rots
in the melting snow
there is the sun's mending breath
for the living
gradually step into dawn
with memories
to hold together our wounds.

VIII
FLIGHT OF THE WINGLESS PHOENIX

the warm snow
beats against my chest
like a tireless, angry warrior
if only I had known
that I didn't need wings
to fly.