

## *Taarof*

In Tehran, words dress up then put on veils for the sidewalks.  
I ask the taxi driver, how much? He says, it's not worthy  
of you. I've to disagree, because he'll think I can put a hat  
on his head and I think he's putting a watermelon under my arm.

Before getting into the elevator, I negotiate with a client  
on whether he's my slave, I'm the dirt under his feet, or  
who should be sacrificed for whom. When he introduces me,  
his boss puts his hand on my shoulder, saying, a hundred years  
to these years, place your foot on my eyes, our eyes lit up.

When I come home late, my mother greets with: you, father  
burnt, tail chopped. Satan. What kind of dirt should I pour  
on my head? My stomach turned to kabob. Still the same  
soup, the same bowl. Where were you?

Lucky for me, she's only worried, her stomach making salt.  
She isn't angry, like my girlfriend's father who is waiting  
by the door, calling: your father's a dog. I'll hit so hard,  
light will fly out of your eyes. I'll bring out your father.  
Do you think you've dropped from the elephant's nose?

We care for the water in our faces. Censors care for  
our dictionary and the silence in the folds of pages.  
When I look up "pants," I get a traffic sign exclaiming.  
They clean up our mistakes, turn breast into a milk-producing  
factory. They believe our mouths smell of milk.

My mother says, don't eat your worry, golden liver. She says  
she wants to eat my liver. My friend is pleased, your breath  
is warm; who smelled the palm of your hand? It's a donkey  
inside a donkey. Our language with no math or book.

No wonder I walk by the warning symbols to wait for the sign:  
A station assistant will no longer be assigned to this entrance.  
I'm not afraid of the Emergency Exit. I multiply with the security  
cameras. Maybe I read too much into Always Watch the Gap  
or Do Not Lean on the Door. I want the donkey and the dates.

## *Sleights of Hand*

Was it Michelangelo's God sparking creation with his hand  
Or the Renaissance and perspective hiding the creator's deft hand?

Painting himself painting the picture we can't see, Velazquez casts light.  
Watch the hue in the atelier, the motion. Can you see who's at hand?

Afraid of what's in his bed, pleading like Lorre in *M*,  
Schiele painted all night staring at his fingers, his thin hands.

Crouched over spread canvas, holding buckets of spilling paint,  
Pollock saw himself a worker celebrating oceans stirred by hand.

Photographers paint with their eyes and the brush of the shutter's wing.  
Will they still remember blind Monet painting with the other hand?

Does it open as a wing, lifting, or close like a stone, sinking?  
Can you tell a soul by its skin, what it holds: these hands?

The miniature painter draws the colors of geometry, afraid  
of the portrait, afraid it rivals the real as secondhand.

The printing press took away the author's gesture, his ink.  
Now we only find copyrights, fingerprints without hands.

If you want to see the painter, don't search for the self-portrait,  
look for curves in branches and footsteps of bristles leashed by his hand.

O Saghi, I search for your name, pour you emails, and drink your tales.  
But how do I hold you, let you come into my keyboard hands.

Who's the maker? What's the brand? Where is the signature? Why is it  
we are always wondering, searching for a mark left by no hand?

Greedy Gharib, how do you plan to paint and sign yourself in verse?  
What are you holding? And if there is nothing? Open your hands.