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Douma

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Douma

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Poem: Douma

Yehudith Dashevsky

Introduction

This poem is a response to two particular events. On July 31, 2015, Jews in masks firebombed a house in Douma, a Palestinian village in the West Bank. The fire led to the immediate death of a baby and the later death of the parents. On the wall outside the home, the following graffiti was found: “Revenge” and “Long live the Messiah.” On August 3, 2015, Palestinian people firebombed a car driven by a Jewish woman in the Beit Hanania neighborhood of East Jerusalem. The woman received first and second degree burns on 15 percent of her body. These two events preceded the Wave of Terror in 2015-2016, also known as the Car-Ramming or Knife Intifada. This poem reflects on all this from various angles at different moments in time.

Did you see the hand that threw it? Straight into the baby. Boom.
Did you see the fire licking up the windy air, the empty room?
Hey you, are you a Jew?
That graffiti stains that prayer.
Through slits their eyes dance
back and forth. Is history a lopsided arrow, is it circular?

Sighing will relieve the tension. The footage of a film from 1947 circles to a family standing around a battery radio. In the sparse space of their living room, they lean over one another as they tally the votes on a scrap of paper, a prayer that others allow them a land, I mean, divide the land in two. When the radio booms the results, the cobblestone streets fill with people circle-dancing: a Jewish tradition tells of two mothers who shared a house. Once, or a long time ago, one mother turned

in her sleep, smothering her baby. She switched the babies, then denied the act. So they turned to King Solomon, who ordered to cut the living baby in two. It was a mind trick. Classic Jewish trial. The real mother would refuse, Solomon knew, and back to its rightful mother's room he returned the living baby. Is a land a baby? Have we gone full-circle? Once, or not so long ago, sirens wailed together with the muezzin's call-to-prayer as cars rammed into people on the sidewalk and people learned to jump at every boom.

Once or not so long ago, a woman drove on a winding highway. Boom — A teen threw a Molotov and watched the fire catch; his arm traced a circle back to throw another. Everything in the car was burned except a book of prayers.

Not so long ago, the woman gave birth, her charred legs dancing.

Stop. Why do you bring it back to being about you?

I trace my finger across the bookshelf in the woman's sister's bedroom.

A friend's boyfriend lay unconscious in a hospital room,
after a hit-and-run at the Gush Etzion Junction, where Arabs and Jews
catch rides at that bus stop, at that junction — boom — where
students from my school hitchhiked to pray
at Rachel's tomb. Little sunspots on the cave, shifting, dancing.
Boys in bulky uniforms lean out of the booth built on that traffic circle

and watch the white license plate of a non-citizen car loop around the traffic
circle.

On the leather of the steering wheel the driver's fingers tap out a prayer
as a boy strides toward the car, hesitating. Today, the soldier does the wave-
him-through-dance
naturally. In a desert forest, trees come crashing down, unheard boom
box music streams under the tunnels, over the fences, into the baby's empty
room.

I sit and hear the Jews cry wolf, the wolf call "Jew."

In Douma the baby grips the crib bars, as the Jew
sets fire to his room. Rain washes out the thunder's
boom. The prayer rises in smoke-rings, smoldering in circle-dances.

Yehudith Dashevsky is a junior from New Jersey studying English and Russian.
Despite knowing four languages, she believes she is not actually fluent in any of them
— except, well, maybe Hebrish.