

*Cyra S. Dumitru*

## **A Western Woman Puts On a Burka**

Step into a hottub filled with quicksand.  
You can warm the sand first by lining the perimeter  
with fire-scorched stones. You can even  
add dye the color of blue-melted sky.

Fill your lungs with air before you drop.  
This will be your last deep breath for a while.  
Once you're encased, feel free to wave your arms,  
watch the sand ripple and bubble.

You could pretend that you're swimming  
in place, that you have somewhere to go.  
When you feel completely coated,  
have someone lift you: a brother,

father, husband, grown son.  
Have the man take a letter opener, carve  
a grid for your eyes to squeeze through.  
Stand motionless, you might drip

just a little, until the sand dries.  
Keep your legs together. Remember,  
the burka should flow  
unarmed as the serpent.

As your burka dries, the world might  
soften, sound as if it's taking place  
a few streets away,  
leaving you free from stares

at your cleavage and smeared lipstick.  
You can smirk, scowl, hum softly  
without reproach—entertain  
your own thoughts within this striding

curtain, this private theatre. Here  
you can become the secret—  
the offstage woman carrying the pearl  
handled dagger, the leather book of potions,

the key to the attic library,  
the missing slipper,  
the answer to the question:  
who do you say I am?

## At the Site

—from an article in *The New York Times*

*We're used to it* he said while  
sprinkling sand into puddles  
of blood. The pale sand lifted  
the red, gave it new substance

another body now that the host  
was dismembered. Bits of blue

cloth clung to overreaching branches.  
*We're used to it* he said bending  
to collect a brown shoe  
that pointed the way out

of Baghdad. As he carried the shoe  
toward the safety barrier watching nearby,

a sudden breeze rippled an orange string  
of prayer beads dangling from a hook.  
*What's different about this one  
is that we know his face. We*

*found his head intact. I blame  
everyone.* The shoe held its tongue.

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