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The Woman in the Front Row

feels vexed with the poet on the stage.
The poet makes jokes. People laugh.
But everything is so bad, back in the old homeland,
separation wall towering
over farmers' skimpy crops,
constant battering from gun butts.
Americans against injustice
should be demonstrating
night and day.

Do you pray? The woman calls out.

I describe, the poet says. I invoke.

Encourage seeing a different side.

But do you pray?

I pray in my own way. (It's what the poet has always said.)

This is like plucking a wriggly worm from a bucket

as far as the woman in the front row is concerned.

She shivers with irritation. Her eyes are slits.

The poet doesn't want Palestinians

reduced to ciphers of sorrow.

Village laughter still echoes

though the people who laughed

are silent or dead.

Red poppies, despite guns.

What? Would you flatten them?

Don't lose this too.