

# IN FLAMES

MIRIAM BLACK

He promises  
Assures me that all is well  
He promises  
-- Even as my throat goes cold --  
That he will take care of my charcoal.  
He promises me  
-- Even as they alight in white flame,  
Looking like painted tikis --  
That he will take care of my charcoal.

The dark night swims around us  
Fate smiles and brings a chill,  
Drawing us closer to the flames.

His flames.  
My charcoal.  
My charcoal chinks quietly  
He leans in  
And we come close, and I  
I trust him  
His gaze so intense  
I trust him with my charcoal—  
His flame so steady  
—with me. . .  
Which he is happy to take.

And at that moment  
The *I* do  
Amidst charcoal chinking like metal chains  
We fall  
No longer does the dark night caress our coupling--  
Fate throws us into a room.  
His flame in a cylinder is there, half its height,  
But  
Where are my charcoal pieces?

With what can I create!  
His promise—  
A woman is here, wedged in:  
Somehow part of who I'd been  
She was born as Venus was of Saturn's severed part  
She was a sliver of me  
A fraction of that godliness  
A mere piece of all that I am  
But an embodied part—  
*Less.*

He, whose flame had dimmed to a foot warmer  
For this woman's whim  
Rather than a kiln  
For me,  
He gazes upon this fraction of a woman  
And she stares back, smiling as though she were lost.

*Broken.*  
His ears, tuned to her.  
His eyes, away from mine.  
His fire, for another.  
His promises, broken.  
And my charcoal? My ability to create? What of me?  
Left.

*I left*  
Back to the place we had been,  
Scrounged my precious drawing charcoal  
Piece  
By piece  
And determined to endeavour  
without him.