

Nasreen's Story

In the converted barn we gather to hear Nasreen
tell her version of what Iraqis call "the collapse."

Before, things were bad, very bad, but everyone knew
to keep quiet, be patient awaiting Saddam's collapse.

She struggles with words to express her shock and awe,
watching her city's buildings, bridges, lives, collapse.

But also jubilation, faith that the yoke of oppression
had lifted, Saddam's statue yanked down, its collapse

reverberating through the land. Though soon her brother
was taken, tortured, returned only to collapse

in a corner, refusing to leave the house again. How to keep
teaching her students English, after the collapse

of hope? As she waited at the bus stop, a car pulled up, a bullet
ripped into the man beside her, whose collapse

she knew to ignore, staring straight ahead, grateful she
was not the one whose life bled out on the pavement. Collapse

time to this room, where we are safe but shaken, where someone
asks, *What can we do?* And again, the collapse

of hope when Nasreen says, *You also are powerless in this collapse.*
Your government decides what stands, what will collapse.

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