

**GRAHAM BARNHART**

**Pissing In Irbil**

Behind me an old Kurdish woman  
holding cherries in a plastic bag  
rustles gravel

the way you might clear your throat  
if you caught a foreign soldier  
pissing in side-alley rubble

that had been the walls and ceiling  
and staircase of your home. Even rocks  
drag shadows away from me.

Old men beneath the street  
squat in catacomb cellars,  
drinking chai, selling rugs:

Turkish, Iranian, Persian woven  
patterns: old maps, unforgotten  
transgressions, borders made soft,

reassuring to bare feet so that color  
might bloom crimson in the pattern  
pressed by a hundred thousand steps.

Irbil is like Rome in this way,  
it is like Athens, each city suturing  
new skin to the skeleton.

And this is what passes  
for ablution: splattering dust from rubble.  
The woman coughs her black shoe

in the gravel again. Laughing, she offers  
a cherry and slow Kurdish

*This was an Arab's house.*

With cherry seeds  
and the hem of her dress  
she disturbs the dust.