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On My 39th Birthday

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Cover Page Footnote

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LORI DABBAGH

ON MY 39TH BIRTHDAY

I didn't burn the baklava today
while you were gone,
nor did I put too many lentils
into the soup, which might have turned to paste.

I went to three different stores
until I found the cilantro
for the green fava beans and chicken liver
covered in onions and minced garlic.

I even made muffins
like Sylvia after she poised pen to paper
then nestled further into her nest.

Lady Lazarus, the frightened Mrs. Plath
of that genteel tea on Cottage Street,
inhaled gas from her oven
three years before my birth.

One day you may not come home to taste
the Mediterranean meal I've concocted,
but my oven is too full
of batches of baklava and muffins
for the young man from your neighborhood
of balconies overlooking Mount Qassyun.

Do you truly think me
that far from shore
but immensely drowned?

Freshly stepped foot on American soil,
I will ask him how he likes his tea
or better yet, how much sugar
in his Arabic coffee.

I may never learn to roll grape leaves
tight enough
or fashion kibbee
into those smart little balls.

I will let the grape leaves simmer anyhow
on the stovetop,
for he does not mind it
if sometimes they break apart.