

***After the Funeral of Hamad Assam\****

*(For my mother, David and Laura)*

Cast:

Hajj Abbas Habhab: my grandfather  
Sine Hussin: an old friend of my father  
Hussein Hamod Subh: my father  
Me

6 p.m.

middle of South Dakota  
after a funeral in Sioux Falls  
my father and grandfather  
ministered the Muslim burial  
of their old friend, Hamad Assam

me - driving the 1950 Lincoln  
ninety miles an hour

“STOP! STOP!  
Stop this car!”

Why?

“STOP THIS CAR RIGHT NOW!” - Hajj Abbas  
grabbing my arm from  
the back seat

“Hysht Iyat? (What’re you yelling about?)” - my Father

“Shu bikkee? (What’s happening?)” -Sine Hussin

I stop

“It’s time to pray” - the Hajj  
yanks his Navajo blanket  
opening the door

“It’s time to pray, sullee  
the sun sets  
time for sullee”  
my Father and Sine Hussin follow  
obedient  
I’m sitting behind the wheel  
watching, my motor still running

car lights scream by  
more than I’ve ever seen in South Dakota

the Hajj spreads the blanket  
blessing it as a prayer rug  
they discuss which direction is East

after a few minutes it's decided  
it must be that way  
they face what must surely be South

they face their East, then notice  
I'm not with them

"Hamode! Get over here, to pray!"  
No, I'll watch  
and stand guard

"Guard from what - get over here!"

I get out of the car  
but don't go to the blanket

My father says to the others:  
"He's foolish, he doesn't know how  
to pray."

they rub their hands  
then their faces  
rub their hands then  
down their bodies  
as if in ablution  
their feet bare  
together now  
they begin singing

three old men  
chanting the Qur'an in the middle  
of a South Dakota night

*Allahu Ahkbar  
Allahu Ahkbar*

*Ash haduu n lah illah illilawhh  
Ash haduu n lah illah illilawhh*

Muhammed rasoul illawh  
in high strained voices they chant

*Bismee lahee  
A rah'manee raheem*

more cars flash by

*se humdililah  
rub il al a meen  
arrahman il rahim  
al humdilelahi  
rub el se a meen*

*Malik a youm a deen  
Ehde nuseerota el mutakeem  
Seyrota la theena*

I'm embarrassed to be with them

*En umta ailiy him  
Ghyrug mugthubee aliy him*

people stream by, an old womans strains a  
gawk at them

*Willaathouu leen-  
Bismee lahee*

I'm standing guard now

*A rah'maneel raheem  
Khul hu wahu lahu uhud*

they're chanting with more vigor now  
against the cars- washing away  
in a dry state  
Asaam's death—  
he floats from their mouths

*Walum yakun a kuf one uhud  
Willa thou leen*

his head in white, his grey mustache still

Ameen...

I hear them still singing  
as I travel half-way across  
America  
to another job  
burying my dead  
I always liked trips, traveling at high speed  
but they have surely passed me  
as I am standing here now  
trying so hard to join them  
on that old prayer blanket—  
as if the pain behind my eyes  
could be absolution

\*The Muslim prayer in this poem is similar to the Lord's Prayer. This poem was originally published as  
"After the Funeral of Assam Hamady."