Alex Vartan Gubbins

Alex Vartan Gubbins was the recipient of the 2014 Witter Bynner Translation Grant (Arabic) and a finalist in the *North American Review*’s James Hearst Poetry Prize in 2015. Recently, he’s been published in *Masque & Spectacle, By & By Poets*, and *Bird’s Thumb*. He holds a BA in African Languages and Literature from University of Wisconsin-Madison and an MFA from Northern Michigan University.
RECIPES

To my friend, Mano

When I order the Monti,
you lift your right hand quick
from your pocket and squeeze
the air like you’ve plucked
a secret from the kitchen
to show me a part of you
still back in Aleppo.
The photograph you flip to
on your phone: vines streaming
a red wall with green leaves
that sweep into a clean street
you claim to have discovered
a crush’s lips twenty years ago:
Mina, with opal hair & feather lashes
polished under meniscus moon,
like crystal on the desert’s edge
that tucks childhood into a dream
when you sniff the pulse of flour
and egg and lamb in stone oven,
when the city meant pulling in
her body to give in to instinct,
when you blasted Nizar Qabbani
on a battery radio to drown out echo
of lips smacking in the alley
between church and pharmacy,
where you’d rush if asked
by mother to pick up prescription
because you knew Mina would
whisper breaths like flowing river
on your cheeks, her hips moving
into your grip, her olive neck
you know now a color of the past,
when sunsets would spiral rainbows
through the stained glass image
of apostles, when the bells
& call-to-prayer would tighten
together in the sky, & walkers
would gather for a hookah
after dinner, when chatting
& feeling a full stomach
were understood
in the same tongue.
GYUMRI’S LAST TUFF STONEMASON
SEARCHES FOR GODDESS ASTIG

because each hammer blow
to the centrum
plegdes hours & oomph

because during the earth’s forming
lava must’ve cooled a spine

because the ground’s tremors
while shattering stone
is a rope between their hands

because he believes lips are buried
in the grain’s glass puddle

because shims can fill the prophecy
we knew to be: everything breaks,
everything needs an inch of light

because to smooth away ridges
carves a labyrinth for the blind

because he’s vowed to finish
her corners as his ancestors
angled Gayane Church

because before alphabet & cow
came rapping through the night

because his joints are a pull-cart
dragged dozens of trips in winter,
quarry to building sites
because his skin becomes rubber,  
the tarp a wing, & chords bones

because of melted snow, candlelight  
amps to glisten her hair of moss,  
of granite lines, of tones
HER TREE

Ellipsis fruit
falls from a branch
the snap a citrus serenade

She rubs the sour plump to limestone
such power when the acidic is squeezed
measured sweet & hung on like bells

To dominate the shapes when two in hand
careful study of branches a browning bark
like old meringue abreast over trunk

To restore the resting root she lies upon
embraces upward the towards of the sky
she-body beneath lightning skates

The through wreathing canopy spins
tentacle rays pulpy droplets
she the ringer of feeling she has legs

Here to touch a grass her hair
before dark the burning cold
never’s old around the edges