

## EZRAS NASHIM

*Tovah Gidseg*

### I.

A low wall cleaves men from women at prayer  
Husbands from wives, brothers from sisters  
Tablets of the covenant, broken in two

Pushing women into community  
Sanctifying a brief disruption of each family unit  
Just until the end of shacharis

For a moment they are not wives  
Partnering now with G-d alone, answering to G-d alone  
*Kadosh! Kadosh! Kadosh!*

Couples unpaired across the mechitza  
Who goes with whom?  
An impossible matching game

### II.

The women's section is a garden of headscarves  
Of gauze woven through with gold thread, felted hats, glossy wigs  
And the uncovered heads of the unmarried

We bend, sway in a dance with G-d  
Whisper well-worn praise to the heavens  
Whisper well-worn comfort and gossip across chair-backs

A low wall bisects the room back to front, but I find my place  
In the back of the sanctuary where the divider ends,

Body mostly with the women, yet some part of me pushing into  
men's space

Cracked-spine siddur with butterfly-wing pages cradled in my arms  
A book of awe, the yearnings of our people  
Settling into my football hold

Button-down pressed hard against yesterday's iron  
Black slacks bold, fresh #2 fade  
*Hineini*

An older woman stares at me, whispers to her daughter  
Who smiles towards me, whispering back to her mother:  
*She belongs here*

### III.

From here I see the family I have built, separate  
My love sits in the front row of this space, apart  
So we each can focus on our words to the Divine, not on each other

Away from her I can better utter praise for that which is larger  
Whose arms are as strong as hers when I fall into them  
But not as soft

Our children run between us, laughing, stealing hugs  
Sticky hands tug a mother's skirt or shirt cuff  
Stage-whispers from lollipop-lacquered lips

I stand near the door, wrapped in prayer  
Close to the men, but firmly within the territory of women  
Dyke sentry at the mouth of the ezras nashim