

## SAFETY

*“Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.”*

– Hellen Keller

Growing up in a small town,  
I knew everyone on the block,  
walked unchaperoned to school,  
played Kick the Can after dark.  
Mom and Dad were always there  
when I sallied out on my steed to slay the dragon.  
I wore a suit of chain mail  
and wielded a magic sword.  
In the face of defeat, I retreated  
to a castle encircled by a moat,  
and my parents pulled up the drawbridge.

I have lived my adult life in medium-sized towns and cities,  
conducted solitary research  
in remote mountain valleys and desert grasslands,  
traveled to parts of the world of which I’d only dreamed.

From experience, I know  
the world is dangerous, unpredictable  
    mugged at knife point in my D.C. neighborhood  
    face-to-face with the moose that exploded  
        through the willows  
    witness to the death of a wildebeest calf  
    under the claws and teeth of lions  
    holding the shrunken body of my mother  
    as cancer drained her life

On the television screen, I witness  
    men, women, and children shuffling  
        through the blood-red valleys  
        of the shadows of death and destruction  
    Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Paris, New York City

Even my home town, Albuquerque,  
flickers on the evening news  
    the desolate graves on the West Mesa  
    the blood-stained home of my doctor, Kathy Finch  
    the charred bathtub where 10-year-old  
        Victoria Martens met her grisly end

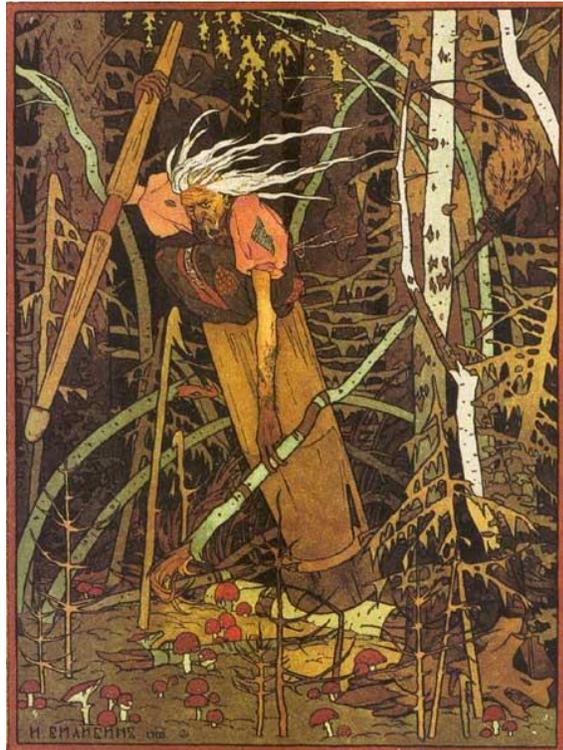
The world is awash in gray and crimson.

I have entertained warning voices  
hide in the basement  
get bigger guns  
build the castle walls higher around us, or even  
refuse to believe in dragons

Today I feel older. The eyes of that child  
in her puny, imaginary armor are wide open.  
I fear the omens of aching bones and joints  
loss of physical or mental capacities  
limits on new adventures  
a contracting world of loved ones and experiences

The future is still uncertain,  
the world is still full of blood and ashes.  
My own fate flickers,  
glimmers even, from beyond clouds and mist,  
and so, I ponder different voices  
lessons about life as a daring adventure  
the fearsome wisdom of the wild crone, Baba Yaga,  
as she rows her cauldron across the sky  
Perhaps I should abandon my quest for safety,

once again  
believe in dragons.  
But this time I will gather up  
my crone's robes of feathers,  
spider webs, and old bones.  
I will wedge my toe  
between glittering green scales,  
mount the dragon,  
fly through the heavens in flames  
with a roar of laughter,  
to embrace my one wild life.



—*Baba Yaga*, by Ivan Biliban