

Childhood Dreams

Parachinar, Punjab, the Hindu Kush -
Deliciously the words roll in my mouth,
And melt like butter curls and memories.

Early mornings, before the midday heat,
My mother sat with me under a chinara tree
And taught me how to read the newspaper,
Just like a grownup, and how to spell
Chrysanthemum.

At night I lay in a small white room
On a narrow cot strung with cords
And slept and dreamed my childhood dreams
While the bantam chicks poked for worms
In the weeds outside.

They tell me that Parachinar,
My childhood home,
Is home to Al-Qaeda now,
A Madrassah training camp.

Who sleeps now in the small white room,
On the narrow cot strung with cords,
And do dreams still float in space
While the bantam chicks poke for worms
In the weeds outside?

PORTRAIT IN BLACK AND WHITE

A grand clutter of magpies
in judges' robes flutters to fill
the bone-bare branches
of winter trees. They stare
at me, then burst into mad
crackles of raucous laughter.
What, I ask them, is the joke?
The heavy load of winter snow
that slid sharply off the roof,
just missing me? The small cat
dashing by with piteous mews
to disappear into an open door?
The magpies do not answer.
Again in unison, abruptly they
cease their clatter to fly away,
bright plumage shining black
and white in icy winter light.

A Resting Place

(Newspaper headline reads Baby's Foot found in Desert Cave)

Air crackles with dry heat. My tongue swells and wants to fill my mouth, choke out my life.. Above, the noonday sun glares, indifferent to whether we mortals survive or not in this empty, arid desert, fit for neither foolish man nor beast.

Dark shadowed space ahead invites me in and I lurch forward to seek relief from heat become unbearable. I squeeze into the small hollow and give thanks for rest and cooler air. My body, sensing it will live to see another day,

relaxes and I lean back, grateful. Off to my side I glimpse a small pink object. It seems to glow. Am I hallucinating? I peer more closely, and in amazement see that small pink object is a foot, a tiny foot, a tiny baby's foot. Just the

foot is there, no small ankle, chubby leg, nor rounded baby's body. The toes are slightly curled as if in pleasure at some private glee and the sole rests lightly, lightly on the sandy floor, too light to leave a mark or slight imprint of its brief passage.

My mind reels and wants to vault into the horror of the unknown Hows and Whys, but instead I take a moment to worship at the altar of this small and unprotected foot, so brave in its aloneness, and somehow still alive, that waits silently (for what?) in the cool shadow of the cave.

Email from my friend

My birthday today and I am 67 and full of love for you and for the snow geese, hundreds rising white against the sky blue of a corn field flooded with melted winter snow. They circle like floating snowflakes, fluorescent in the still air, and glide gently back to water, honking, splashing, a mini snowstorm turning the blue waters white again.

Tonight a hockey play-off with pizza afterward, The pizza is good and I will eat too much. The beer is cold and I will drink too much – but it's my birthday and I like pizza better than cake anyways. But nobody will bring candles.

And I like being 67 and full of love for you and for fluorescent snow geese that float like snowflakes in the still air. And I thank the great creator for these drifts of white snow geese - and for loving you.

The First Time

I do not remember the details of the first time we made love, only the moment of melting naked into naked and the opening yes to love and yes oh yes oh

I remember no feeling but the strong pulse of your thrust reaching up and into my heart opening and then falling and the slippery swirling wetness of rising deep and wide and down to the first coming. And then lying still, imprinted.