

## At the Armenian Carpet Shop

Home from a spring tour in Turkey,  
visions of lapis and gold, minarets and  
carpets. I bought one in Cappadocia, they  
told me I had been given a big discount and  
that the graceful local girls  
doing the intricate loom-work were  
being paid not to migrate to Ankara or Istanbul.

It was a beautiful bit of tapestry-- everyone said so--  
really more of a tiny throw- piece all aqua and floral,  
fringed in the Persian style—,  
a splurge that would bring happiness. The owners  
reminded me it was not just for me, but to be passed  
on to my daughters and any daughters they might have.

Such mercantile romantics-- I  
delighted in carrying the carpet curled in my suitcase on  
the flight back to New York and not  
declaring it in customs because  
the factory swore *it was UNESCO- certified  
and exempt from international duties.*

This two- by- three foot silk on cotton rug radiated  
some magical power lying in the living room  
catching soft light of a north facing window, its woven threads  
refracting the hours, like the sea's surface as  
any sunny day unfolded and yet

I was vaguely uneasy in that way we have,  
of not having paid too much, not  
being naïve American sucker- tourists, so  
I finally took the thing to a local carpet store  
owned and run by Armenians  
they immediately declared I had indeed bought a  
treasure, the younger woman in the shop took  
photographs in case they could find a companion, oh

but I had *paid* too much, and the silver haired woman,  
mother of the first, emerged from the back of the shop  
took one look and said,

*You know, there's something about  
Turkey, people come back so happy and they've **paid** too much.  
Those Turks ply you with tea and sales pressure, you are visiting  
royalty, she, had nothing against Turks really,  
although she had lost much family to them 99 years before.*

She knew, in the 50's, a young Turkish student whom she'd  
taken to the top of Riverside Church and he seemed so kind  
and oddly a little ashamed, she was not sure why--  
she guessed he sensed she was Armenian but it  
never came up really or if it did it was simply by way  
of introduction, as they looked out over the Hudson  
he surprised her declaring, *I love my country but  
we Turks, all of us have black hearts.*

## SWEET SKULLS OF JERICHO

**By about 7000 BC Jericho, based on a natural spring, had developed into a large settlement which may have contained as many as two thousand individuals, and was defended by a substantial wall. The dead were often buried beneath the floors of houses. In some instances the bodies were complete, but in others the skull was removed and treated separately, with the facial features reconstructed in plaster. British Museum exhibit plate**

Maybe men labored under a yellow sky  
bent under barley sheaves they'd cut,  
returned behind limestone walls and leaned  
to splash water on each other at the well.

You can see its crumbling curve today, in one  
city as old when Cheops' pyramid was built  
as pyramids are to us right now.  
Jericho, not so far away from Egypt and,

our archaeologists tell us, likely really didn't hear  
the blare of Joshua's trumpets shuddering down  
old Canaan-cursed by-Noah, coaxing walls  
to quiver, teeter, list from Israelite raids.

You see one barley-bearer shaking dry,  
descend stair-tunnels to his flat to kneel  
before his hungry daughter, hungry wife,  
waiting for evening's barley bread to cool.

He joins as they resume *their* business of the day  
to gently set the cowrie eyes in Grandma's face,  
two priests removed the rest of her last year,  
but left the precious head to decompose at home  
scented in the wall with sweet Netufian herbs,

And now the family gathers near small fire,  
desert nightbreeze filtering through the cracks  
tenderly to soften Mother's bony head  
with daubs of plaster re-create her nose,

and gaping eye sockets, softening too  
those black orbits with white plaster.  
Slowly her death's head touched tenderly  
by younger finger tips becomes  
something like a human head again,

If not quite living, cowrie shells complete

this vision of a vacant queenly stare  
befits a family shrine. When things are done,  
small granddaughter now squeals with delight  
her own dark eyes reflect the fire-light.

## The War that Came Today

will bring honor

will twill the skies like purple calico

will let the jets loose to plough villages

held by rebels holding hostage boys and girls and such

held to keep them safe from harm.

The war that came today will show who's boss

will crater roads, smash skulls, set cars and shirts

and goats and sheep on fire,

bring sweet sleep to the lucky.

## The Kuyker House

At the end of the first stretch of Adeline Street,  
where the houses shade from  
old and stately to old and worn out,

Where the long leaf pines begin  
to overtake the live oaks  
with wisps of Spanish moss.

Sits a white structure with a red tiled roof,  
distinguished yet dowdy,  
to us kids always the Kuyker House-- somehow  
it made our blood run cold.

No clear reason why this should have been,  
except the Kuykers were believed  
to be old, unmarried siblings,  
had always lived there,  
and, we were sure,  
it was also full of cats.

Only two Kuykers were ever seen  
outside the place:  
there was Fanny, frizzled red hair  
old, we thought, at least 50,

Not that she weeded  
the garden or fed  
those felines on the  
crumbling front steps, no

Fanny, when I saw when I saw her,  
was simply studying then lettuce or  
cucumbers at Delchamps  
just like anybody,

or quietly  
waiting in line at Woolworth's,  
and, if I was right behind her,  
smelling faintly of cat.

I would sometimes see her,  
with an ancient woman, silent  
dressed all in black, eyes vacant,  
terrifying.

Yes maybe her mother or aunt,  
but somehow out of place  
looking mournful and Italian  
more than 'Mississippi',

Rumor had it that the family,  
behinds those old stucco walls  
were all odd like that. And,

Rounding the corner on my bike,  
tossing the Hattiesburg American  
into yards, but not theirs,  
a wet yellow October leaf  
floating down  
to a carpet of pinestraw,

I felt proud sometimes  
that the dull drowsy block  
was blessed by  
this house of ghosts.



## High End of the Spectrum

Today in the bright *Light* of day  
a red deer vaulted over my car on a curve  
and dodged—I think-- a line of cars  
in the opposite lane  
to safety. My  
sedan, shone midway between Chinese  
and fire engine red, it was a red day.

Nothing in Latvia will cause me to beg my friend to  
pull her Volkswagon to the side of the road by a  
green sea of *rapsis/flax*, like the splash between  
flax-stems-- of poppies—*Magonites*. They grow together. I  
always want to cut some of these carmine stars  
to put in water, knowing sadly  
that they will not last a day-- out of soil.

Our eye chases red or red chases our eye  
to the delicate feet of the mourning dove on snow  
to red's tiny splash in a Vermeer—The Girl's hat,  
The pearl earring girl's lips,

You pomegranates  
You oozing childcorpses  
You cardinals lighting on bare-beeches  
or in the Vatican, You  
sea-snapperfish on my plate  
You tell-tale hearts  
under the floorboards.

Do gently cut your boy's-arm  
just a bit and me mine,  
and we touch, become brothers.

The 13.8 billion light--year farthest, farthest  
out galaxy, colorized, perhaps  
but what do you suppose that color is?  
And when I die what red remaining  
within me will be motionless.

