

The Afghan

The wind blew through his wispy beard
And through his caftan ripped
His shriveled hands wrapped 'round a cup
Of tea he slowly sipped

His eyes were shining like black sparks
Deep from his aged face
The scarf draped 'round his thin shoulders
Fluttered down to his waist

Seated on the dust with legs crossed
His back bent o'er with age
The fire flickered before him
As he stared into the flames

His days on this earth were many
His remaining ones few
For man could not live forever
This in his heart he knew

'Twas evening and the sun had set
He watched the children play
He smiled at their shining eyes
For of his blood were they

He remembered his boyhood days
The sun, the dust the shouts
Kicking the torn leather football
Cries from a dozen mouths

He remembered his mother's face
And her small, calloused hands
Her forehead pressed against his own
Her hair black silky strands

As they recited Rumi's lines
Whispering in the night
Sleeping in one another's arms
Until the morning light

He remembered his father's face
His voice, his beard, his eyes
His look of stern indifference
Concealing paradise

For it was paradise they had
Despite these humble walls
For love was in their hearts
And the peace of God in their souls

Suffering was their lot, he knew
Rich in gold were they not
But when they closed their eyes to sleep
Curled 'round the embers hot

Their dreams were sweet and colorful
Their hearts were light and free
The stories whispered in the dark
Echoed eternity

He remembered his small sister
Her bright black laughing eyes
Her green dress with the silver hem
Her bare feet and shrill cries

Surely the sky is all too small
Too small to keep my heart
Under its graceful azure arch
Soon 'twill from it depart!

He remembered his mighty youth
In all its flushed glory
The dew of youth was on his brow
Every thought a story

His thoughts had been lofty and short
Stardust and nothing more
They were far away from him
On an alien shore

For beauty was not in stardust
That our eyes never meet

But in the red powdery clay
Beneath our sandaled feet

Beauty was in the eyes of her
With hair as black as night
Around her face the blue scarf draped
her eyes dancing with light

Beauty was in the white lily
That grew along the stream
It was in the lush green rice fields
Flashing in lightning's gleam

It was in the roar of the wind
In the rush of the stream
In the orange glow of the flames
In the sky's reddish gleam

The mullah's wafting call to prayer
That floated past the sun
Water dripping from calloused hands
They lined up one by one

There was a beauty in prayer
In the round shiny beads
A rhythm in the Arabic
A gentle sunlit peace

Life was beautiful, thought he
Beautiful on its own
'Twas Allah's greatest gift to man
And in their eyes it shone

He sighed and lied down on the ground
His face turned to the sky
His hands resting atop his chest
The embers glowing by

He felt a hand on his forehead
And saw his daughter's face
She wiped his brow with a cool cloth
A blanket 'round his waist

"Fear not, daughter," he said to her
"I am not sick, but well
I hear the stars calling my name
This body's but a shell

"I have lived and seen much beauty
In this world through these eyes
And all that's left for me to do
Is to see the moon rise

"I have one last thing to tell you
Sweetest daughter of mine
That was born in the heart of spring
When the drops of dew shine

"This life is a beautiful dream
We bloom and bear like trees
'Tis our portion under the sun
To fade away like leaves

"Therefore go, pray and weep with joy
Forgotten are our sins
Allah is merciful and great
Our black hearts will he cleanse

"Anoint your head with sweet ointment
Dress in cotton and silk
Teach your sons to love life and peace
With joy eat bread and milk

"Rejoice in love and prayer
Do not forget to dream
Rejoice in the wind, in the sand
In the stones by the stream

"Grieve me not, nor mourn overmuch
I die with joyful tears
The dreadful crescent up above
Is sign my prayer he hears."

Then she wept and kissed his forehead
His eyes glistened with light

They were soft and full of wisdom
They gazed into the night

He saw chariots and horses
He saw dust, blood and flames
He heard the mountains echo back
The screams of the sun's rays

There were bright jasper blue tiles
Of Mazar-i-Sharīf
Swirling oriental spirals
Quivering in the heat

Pigeons' wings snapped in front of him
Crystal drops floated down
The sky became a cupola
That spun 'round and around

The old bazaar's cacophony
Distorted in his ears
The colors and shadows of men
Fade into blurry smears

The breath of God blew over him
His brow was cool as night
The flame of life ascended up
Like smoke in candlelight

Son of Afghanistan he was
His heart full, his eye clear
And in those calloused hands he clutched
His daughter's ever dear

Some call him dead, some call him gone
I know not why they do
For in the eye of each Afghan
I see his spirit too

This nation's heart is much too large
To fit beneath the sky
Beyond the clouds to starry night
Rises their children's cry

On the ground mingled dust and tears
In the wind the flag flies
In the blue sky visions of hope
Afghanistan, arise!