

## *Dilruba, Sarang*

We were meant to be bartering for a rug the colour of blood oranges.  
But our conversation got derailed. She was from Kunduz.  
We both were childless.  
But someone in her village had given her a girl.  
*No here.* She jerked her head. The Taliban, she explained  
by pulling her nose, hunching shoulders to show how wretched  
the women grew. *How they tell me how to pray? Who knows this?*  
*In here?* She said, hitting her breast harder than I would have.  
Her sister stayed years in one room where music was buried  
--now she dug-- under wood floors where joy had been kept  
in a casket. *Dilruba, Sarang!* she clapped her hands,  
said the words as if I'd understand, laughing.  
Then seriously she tapped my head. *Music,* she said  
as she began to dig holding a shovel made of air.  
She danced, two steps of a jig atop a rug whose greys  
were the wood smoke of her eyes grown distant and strange.  
This was the rug I carried home. A nap of brown  
shot with Caspian blue, clipped close as a boy's head.  
My husband didn't understand. It wasn't red.  
We'd said red, or orange. But then I told him  
how music, unburied, can fill a belly like a piece of bread.  
The toulia is a flute. The tar has two strings, looks like a lute.  
A woman without a child must give birth to something.  
*Dilruba, Sarang!* I said pointing to my breast. *In here.*

# Contraception

In the Sahara, it's stones in the uterus of a camel.  
For Casanova, it was gold balls slipped in a womb.  
For a lass in a field, it's a handful of tadpoles;  
fried quicksilver for Plato's kid sister.

Always as many ways to stop conception as to conceive.

I knew an old woman who used her mother's wedding ring.  
Hippocrates advised a hollow reed or stream washed pebbles.  
Now it's comet coils and zipper rings.  
An Egyptian queen swore by a spider made of agate.

And I, who have used nothing at forty, still want and wait.

## Life Studies

Dusk and I sort socks, head down, jack off,  
quick roll up in the bog, get blown,  
darn socks, another dog day done, banged up till the Goat stars  
rise at dawn and this girl watches me,  
who could be her father, as I sit on the edge of a woolly bed,  
model geezer, two lives gone and one butterfly  
in the December grey sucks light from a stone.  
A world away, the other side of the bars, my teacher  
could be a winged body, light as a needle,  
blown in from Mexico where my dreams will fly.  
I'm glad she's not my daughter. Blow me,  
but I would screw her, Socrates,  
teach her how a banged up man  
can suck bliss from a moment thin as this,  
a college girl born to rubberneck  
an old man's grief while her world opens with a buzz  
and she walks free like Christ upon the waters.