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Fatima

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Sabin Willett concentrates his practice in commercial litigation and bankruptcy litigation. He is experienced in complex commercial disputes and the representation of lenders and other institutional creditors in lender liability cases and complex Chapter 11 disputes, as well as general commercial litigation. He has written numerous journal articles and has authored three books: *Present Value* (Random House, 1998), *The Betrayal* (Villard, 1996), and *The Deal* (Random House, 1996). Since 2005, he has also been active in the firm's work attempting to restore the rule of law at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. He has procured release for three detainees and is actively litigating for nine others in the D.C. Circuit.

FATIMA

by Sabin Willett

Isaiah

Church bells in the Old Town. He frowned and counted out the chime,
As chilled commuters bundled past him from the train —
Two bells and dusk already! The old man thought, “It’s time.”

A salty blow from off the harbor brought the Stockholm rain,
And wet the prism lights now strung for *Jul* in Gamla Stan.
Isaiah felt the sting and pulled his collar close. “It’s time to sing again.”

Again to sound the song of lions down with lambs,
Again of princes and of peace and war beguiled,
Again to thunder out the ancient words and dithyrambs,

And that verse—you know the one—about a little child.
As Isaiah chanted soft (unmarked by any in the throng)
One word added. “Lead them *here*,” he said. Then hobbled
up the cobblestones and smiled.

* * *

Nor I nor any rushing for the station heard—for we’d no time
To tarry. Hurrying past perhaps we caught a word or two,
Or while queueing for the tickets caught a snatch of rhyme —

Was all. We neither saw nor heard nor marked what blew.
(Thought we raced *toward* encounter with divine.
We’d not yet met her, Fatima). Eager but distracted too.

Searching, found the Flygplats sign and
Boarding train we urged that sluggard Time: “Your hands unglue!”
Noses at the window glass we strained to see the long imagined.

The Uyghurs flagged the airport lounge with royal blue

Of Turkestan (a place forbidden save in song), wind-tossed Adel
There at last to meet. To be among them, came we too.

Erect as prow of Viking Longship Adel's sister steers
Surf ceaseless with arrivals. The customs door slides open —
Shuts again on air. No matter. Kavser's waited like a rock for years.

Kavser

Black darkness out, no finger light of dawn and yet she knew.
She tottered to the bowl and retched, and rinsed her mouth,
And felt the joy and trembling risen from her gut. Two

Children to the Uyghurs. Never more. Two now breathed
Nearby. She'd had the third secreted (with a brother
Whose bride Allah had not blessed). They must leave

Hittay (we China call it). She'd never hide another
From the tear of forceps hungry for this little one.
Her solar plexus tightened. God before all else made Kavser mother.

That night with husband plans of desperation spun
For Pakistan. They spoke in voices low and then they prayed
She nursed the baby. Puked again. Counted money for their run.

By pickup climbed from desert then. They southward made
Through choking dust their course through Himalayan passes for
Islamabad.

But China's arm was long, and spies were many. One betrayed

Abdulatif, her husband. Seized and backward had
Him dragged to Chinese prison. Kavser bereft—no parting. Her
Wallet empty as their mouths. Two children—and the one she carried.

Pitiless Islamabad saw her stoop for coins and little fingers,
Grasp for rice and scraps of bread as hopes flat beaten,
Kavser husbanded her tears for night, but still at dawn they lingered.

Sometimes in the dawn before the children woke a fleeting
Voice she thought she heard. Old man's repeating
Voice? Or child's? That murmur led her to a meeting

With a UN man who winced as Ali cried. She took a seat and
Then with eyes instead of pleas imploring. A
useless try to stop the wailing—two days since they'd eaten.

In fog or tinnitus she was for still a sound like satin
Aspirated in her ear like evensong or matins as
Her eyes fell down upon her swollen belly—*Fatima*.

Or was it, "*Sverige?*" The man described the far-off place as
Echoed round her still the murmur. Whither came this sound to earth?
Kavser shivered, shushed the babies, brushed the tears from sodden faces,

Followed then the murmur's leading on—brought forth
In Sweden *Fatima*. The baby kindled in her mind aswirl
The dream that husband *Abdulatif*, at last released could follow north —

He did. And nursed she next a deeper dream—and slow unfurled
Prayer simple as a pulse, and as a beacon regular and true,
Years radioed to darkness. Then—faint, so faint!—came signal back
from just outside the world.

* * *

For *Fatima* first *Kavser* came this weary journey through,
To Stockholm six years past. That night would come to *Kavser*
There her brother. It seemed to us that *Fatima* led *Adel* too.

Adel

Long years from China fled and sight of wife and son and all expelled
To Kyrgyzstan and other Stans, unfathomable the wind that spun
Young *Adel* round from town to all the Asian towns inscrutable God
willed.

Until the eagle shrieked from down the mountains of the Kush. 2001.

Bomb blasts and shattered huts. Cried out they all below
For God. But lost Him in the drone of bombers, thud of guns,

And looking up for help saw only paper snowflakes. “Ready cash to go,”
They read—“For strays and strangers—sawbucks on the barrelhead!”
Read by many—and by him who him betrayed. Thus Adel to
 Guantánamo.

That was years before, a time confused. First hope—Americans!—quick
 turned to dread,

Gave way when after Afghan pen was bound and chained to Cuba led
In gag and goggles. All gave way. He gathered in. He lost the thread

So long ago. “Evaporated from the world,” he later said.

Years passed. Or maybe not, for in the pens time idled back, fell in
 arrears —

He’d ceased to be. Wife in China, children gone—and sister? Kavser
 thought him dead.

Fatima

That afternoon she stood on toes and brushed back hair, the
Closet searched for taffeta of rose, godmother’s dress.
A canny knowing in her eyes: she added a tiara.

Her mother at Arlanda watched. At last Time stood—and with Him Adel
 and a valise,

Hope finally made flesh. The barriers of continents and long privations
Fell to sobs, and praising God: hands at shoulders seeking solace.

(In weeks to come they’d grope as well with regulations,
Lawyer’s forms, and filling out the applications.
If one the God, many yet the nations.)

But on arrival night—*Var sâ god!*—Uyghur noodles, loaves of
Nam! Bowls red with piping *shorpa*—full to brim!
“Yimek–shmek!” sang Fatima while leaping from the sofa.

All this with sugared tea and laughter Kavser fed them
At her flat. Adel—stunned by life again—held small ones close,
And closest held the six-year-old who'd led them.

* * *

That night we felt the brush of Heaven's hem, and
With the world began to fall in love again.
As spell on spell upon us fell—from tiara'd Fatima.

*So each December we'll Isaiah's verses find. When we read them,
Winks an elf from 'mid the lines, and we'll remember Stockholm's rain,
And how a little child shall lead them.*

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