

Axis of Evil

by Persis M. Karim

1.

Soheila puts the *samovar* back on the crowded shelf,
sips the last of her dark, red tea.
Her hands sweep across the *sofreh*
on the floor—gathering empty plates
littered with pistachio shells and sprigs of mint.
Tonight they have declared war on Baghdad.
She worries about her young son,
her mother suffering from rheumatism.
Upstairs her husband listens to the radio,
sometimes the BBC, sometimes Voice of America.
But lately it's the government station.
When he hears the sound of the plaintive *ney*
he turns the volume up,
down when the mullahs address the nation.

2.

In a quiet city in the Midwest
a woman opens her umbrella
at the first sight of a last spring rain.
Lately, she's been thinking about her safety.
What will it take to drive back
the forces of evil in our midst?
She's thought more about the places
and people on earth that live
like she does. Checking their watches,
feeding their kids, dutifully
paying their taxes.

3.

All night Mohammed hears the wail of sirens.
In the morning, he watches angry men
hoist long ropes and topple
statues of the Great One.
Let them erase this history –
so long as he can go to school again,
so long as the rain of bullets
ceases.

4.

Soheila awakens to a glorious sunrise.
How can she have turned in her bed
so much and still feel so rested?

Tehran is a lonely city, she thinks,
gazing out her second-story window
at the sad dirtiness enveloping her city.
She thinks too of her deceased father's
voice. His reminders to look always
for *goodness*.

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