

4.7 Her Father's Ring (for Minoo) (1976)

Waking, we learned he'd gone from us
having left a day or two before Now Ruz:
a small step performed
according to his hidden plan,
a step beyond the sea-mark of his life,
embarking on his longest journey
at the turning of the year.

He left us and when we knew he'd gone
what wrench of heart, what empty shriek
to call him back. He'd passed beyond recall,
but must have known we'd scream
like children at the dark chasm of his going –
our father, child: the sickness
in his sturdy frame would lead him
to that place where he could
hear again the early voices in the trees,
the wind from where he came.

Blind, so blind, we let him trade
the ring he left
for his priceless life to take away
and spend in cloistered days:
what nameless room was harbour,
witness, to that lonely trail? -
he even cursed the kin who followed
and bequeathed us
little knowledge of those last few days.
No voice can touch him now.

Privately he'd slipped
beyond the needle's eye while we
had slept on other thoughts.
And now we vow we'll forfeit sleep
and go abroad each night
to shout his name 'Baba! Jalil!'
in every white and nameless street,
in every town we will not cease to call, expect
the silent answer 'He was here but passed',
until we hear the longed-for echo of your voice
to know you pardon us our blindness,
accept the heavy love we owe.

And we shall find you -
saintly, with the feet we loved,
your father's-feet, curled, at rest
in some delicate white enclosure, locked
in that intricate garden which is Iran;
set amongst the myriad villages
you are the motionless traveller
waiting timeless at the gate
for us to come.

Chiswick - 1976.