

This is the Fruit of War
(A Poem Marking the Fourth Anniversary of the War in Iraq)

When the precision bombs began to fall over Baghdad
polluting the evening sky with blasts of heat and light,
I remember standing, frozen, my mind numb, in front of the television.
The commentators spoke with hushed reverence
--ah, the technological genius, the careful planning, the pinpoint accuracy, the bravery!—
but no one mentioned the Tigris down below, moving silently towards the Persian Gulf,
these ancient waters passing Baghdad homes, homes where mothers
cradled their children, a feminine shield against the angry fire from high above.

Now it didn't seem to matter
that we once stood in circles, lit candles, and prayed.
Now it didn't seem to matter
that Daryl Byler fasted forty days and forty nights,
writing simple, exquisite meditations for the President.
Now it didn't seem to matter
that we drove to San Francisco, and emerged from the BART onto Market Street
to find ourselves engulfed by thousands, NO, tens of thousands,
NO, hundreds of thousands, saying NO, NO, NO to the mere idea of this war.
Now it didn't seem to matter.
For the war must go on.
The oil fields must be preserved.
Saddam Hussein, we know, is an evil man.
You can't talk with people like him.

Riverbend goes to her closet and caresses the clothes
that remind her of the woman she once was.
She holds the bright colors in her hands
and whispers the names of friends now departed for Syria.
She studies the face of a Sunni sister, young, shrouded, and pale,
speaking the awful truth of what the Shia men have done.
She pleads for the world to see that
this is the fruit of war.

This is the fruit of war.
The nervous edge in the market.
The loss of trust in the neighbor.
The acid hate and the spiteful love for the occupying foreigner.
And the Tigris River, now a stagnant sewer,
a graveyard for this madness, these civil war dead,
the blood of the ruthless and the innocent, the young and the old,
the Shia and the Sunni, the religious and the secular, the American and the Iraqi,
now blended in death as one.