

Seema

I send a teddy bear
of softest wool
to my cousin-sister Seema,
sixteen and unmarried
in Amritsar because
its melting eyes and
merry red tongue
reminded me of her
She writes

I showed him to my parents
they said I should
put him away in plastic –
He's very safe with all
the others in my cupboard

I send watercolors to Seema,
seventeen and unmarried in
Amritsar – dry tablets trapped
in a white flat metal box.
Her long fingers will soften
and dissolve them, release their power
She sends me galleons
sailing across billows of thin silk
sky very blue, water
green and dangerous.

My parents say the nearest
textile design school is
too far away, for an unmarried
girl to live alone.

I send Seema, eighteen
and unmarried in Amritsar
a book filled with birds,
because ring-necked turtledoves come to her
and grip her shoulders for comfort
and throated love-birds call to her.

My parents say my birds are
too smelly and distracting
Do you know if veterinarians
make as much as or more
than plastic surgeons?

When next we meet
she shows me her
new pink cell phone,

and her text books
on covalent bonding
and hides
The Illustrated Guide to Birds
beneath her bed.

Shauna Singh Baldwin