

November 2001

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You notice the smells first, more spring, or even summer, than late fall, the stale-clean scent of wet sunlit streets after last night's heavy rain, the musk of soaked dead leaves, humid decay in a season usually dry, a shining solstice sigh through open windows, suspended on a candent morning breeze.

U.S. military planners think insurrections encouraged by U.S intelligence operatives will pressure the Taliban into . . . for the first time in many years, a woman strides freely through the ruined streets, her face uncovered, the *burqa* thrown back like a superhero's cape.

The long autumn sun, gone much too early now, still casts the afternoon skyline in an odd, shimmering blue pastel, the light filtered and lazy across the fractured gray water, small pools of stillness like mirrors, a gossamer silver haze over everything, and the dark, late-November trees strangely leafless in the tumid warmth.

His eyes bright with fear and resignation, his
captors in felt hats and heavy flowing robes,
an old man has his beard torn out in fistfuls
before he is shot through the head in a jagged,
burnt-bone sparkle of matted and bloody
hair, his mouth still pleading after he is dead.

Tracking brittle leaves into the house, finally
autumn comes with them, blustering through
the rooms and settling darker colors and cooler
air everywhere. Now, it is just a moment from
snowing, and in shadowy places, huddled in the
coming cold, winter snaps, just out of sight, waiting
to dress the land. Silent, scarred peaceful.

ROBIN RUSSELL received a B.A. in philosophy from Brigham Young University and currently works as a writer and editor in Minneapolis. His poem is here republished in its correct form. *Dialogue* apologizes for the inadvertent omission of a stanza when it was first published in *Dialogue* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 148-49.