**“Afghanistan...” by Zaheda Ghani**

Paper is falling out of the sky. I am in the garden.

It’s sunny day. It comes back to me in slow

motion. I’m three years old. My father is often

amazed at the fact that I should remember this far

back into my childhood. I tell him the

memories are unforgettable.

Paper continues to fall, communist

propaganda literally rains down on us. The

helicopters are so noisy, so high in the sky. I

stand looking up, my arms are wide open.  I want

to catch all the pieces of falling paper.

Paper, paper, everywhere

At least it’s better than when they decide to shower

us with bullets.

Mother is at work. She is a teacher at the school

across the street. You can see it when you

go outside the huge walls of my grandparents’

property.

The walls are made of the thick hay and mud.  I

remember the walls. The height of them makes me

feel protected.  I imagine that these walls

are strong enough to stop the rockets.

I go inside the house to play behind the big black

couch in the main guestroom. This is where we

hide when the sirens sound in the middle of the

night.

One night, I hear my father pray for us to die

together if we are hit. That night he holds mother

and I close to him. I can feel him shivering as I

secretly agree with him. I’ve never seen father

frightened before.

Now, I play with my big red doll when it happens. I

hear a loud noise. I know it is a bomb. I run out

into the garden. Somehow, I find my hand in my

aunt’s hand and I am being pulled behind her.

Small feet try to keep up.

Everyone gathers outside,

smoke rises from the direction of the school. I see

it come up over the wall. The noise numbs my ears.

There is screaming and shouting on the other side

where mother is.

We run out of the gates, into the street, though I

am hesitant.  I don’t want to see her pieces lying

before me. She would be coming home for

lunch now.

All I see is smoke. My heart has stopped, my

knees shake, I know she’s gone. Everyone is

crying. My grandmother holds me.  My head is on her

chest and I watch the smoke. I don’t say a word. I want

her to walk out of the smoke. That’s all I want.

I break free of my grandmother. I stand alone, but

I do not cry. After that I don’t remember what

happens. What I do recall is my mother, running

out of the smoke. She runs towards me. I’m in her

arms. I can smell her.  She smells of mother.  She

holds me tight.  She cries as she whispers “we have

to get away from here.”

My mouth is dry.