

The Last Page

Cashmere from Rachungkaru

Where there was only shadow and brownish red
and reddish brown crumbling stone against the sky
now a sheen descends the folding slopes

lighting the sheep and pashmina goats
like dim flames of a thousand ghosts
at the nomads' summer settlement.

The sheen creeps down across a frozen marsh
of green hummocks uplifted,
I don't know why, like miniature ranges.

Between them laced sheets of ice
delicate as the glaze over a crème brûlée
melt and feed the grass the horses find sweet.

In stone-walled pens kids gather the goats
for women's strong hands the texture and color
of the udders they squeeze, squirting warm milk

steaming into ice-cold pans. They will shear
and spool the silky underdown
into what we call cashmere from the name

of that borderland of traders where conflicts
over maps employ the poor for war
and dub the dead ones heroes.

Two chapped-cheeked children run at ease,
traipse over and ask my name,
as they move with the seasons across the plain.

The moon over the west ridge falls
as the sun over the east ridge rises
balancing for a moment like eyes.

Gregory Shaffer