

Cocoon

POETRY
Mahvash Sabet
2013

Introduction

Mahvash Sabet (b. 1953), a leader in the Bahá'í community in Tehran, Iran, was arrested and imprisoned at Evin Prison in March of 2008 because of her faith. The Iranian government does not recognize the Bahá'í Faith as an official religion, even though it is the largest religious minority in the country. Before her arrest, Sabet worked as a teacher, collaborating with the National Literacy Committee and serving as director of the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education for 15 years. While in prison, Sabet began writing poems, which were smuggled out by relatives and were eventually translated into English by Bahiyyih Nakhjavani. *Prison Poems*, a collection of about 70 of Sabet's poems, was published in 2013. After nearly ten years of imprisonment, Sabet was released in September of 2017. "Cocoon" depicts a speaker wrestling with contradictory feelings.

"I'm tossed to and fro, from
here to there . . ."

NOTES

 Skill:
Connotation and
Denotation

1 There's a part of me that keeps mourning
2 for the soft cocoon where I lay,
3 a part of me that keeps pining
4 for the delicate **chrysalis** smashed and destroyed
5 before my eyes that day.

6 I'm tossed to and fro, from here to there,
7 caught between **compulsions**;
8 I'm thrown left and right and back and forth,
9 longing for the freedom of flight and yet
10 **craving** those soft consolations.

11 When my soul broke free, a part of me
12 **thrilled** at the lift of its arc,
13 but another shrank back in cowering fear
14 from the threatening fires, from the lowering smoke
15 that awaited me in here.

16 All this makes me wonder greatly
17 about **contrary** desires.
18 There's something in me approves of flying,
19 applauds the thought of bravely dying,
20 yet I weep for the cocoon's demise.

The denotative meaning of *cocoon* is a case that insect larva spin as protection when turning into an adult. The connotative meaning here seems to be a bed, a safe place that the speaker remembers before she was arrested and imprisoned.

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