

The 2003 Editors' Prize Contest Winners

THE
SPOON
RIVER Poetry Review

*Tamara Kaye Sellman
Honorable Mention*

Making Paneer

sour the milk
—that's right
boil it up like seafoam

scrape solids
from the bottom
to curds

don't freak out
don't be so damned
Western

the spirit is released
in this way—cover your mouth
if you think it's funny

drain its soft clots
as from a womb
through a cheesecloth robe
squeeze and massage

milk is a living thing
your children's food
be gentle

rinse away its lemon skin
with the slightest spray
don't shatter
the endless shape in it

loosen the belt a little
lean on it like a lover
the whole night in the kitchen

using film-wrapped
cans of beans instead

I have other plans for you

after which we'll divide
our mash into squares at sunrise

set them aside
to let the day through
the night

and with tea on the back burner
our bellies full of eggs
through one more dawn
we'll roll our squares

multiple sets of dice
into cumin and curry
sauteed spinach from our garden
the dal and chickpea and turmeric
I found at the Suq

while you were listening
to streetcorner blues

(see? you never pay attention)

you can only know paneer
by its neighbors
not so different
than the way we know
ourselves

—you like it?—

now try to remember
your smirk
when I said I was making
Indian cheese

—I know—

when you spend good time
with any living thing
you come to like it
at least a little—it's how
I've grown
to love you