The Alchemists
A poem for two voices, dedicated to Patti Quigley and Susan Retik

What is this mystery
That takes the heavy lead
Of your swollen bellies
Weighed down by
Unspeakable September 11 grief

And turns it into the gold of
Chicks and incubators
For fatherless children’s hunger
And for widows to sell
In Afghanistan’s women-only markets?

Schoolchildren and senators
Brought food and toys and quilts.
“They gave us everything we needed,” you said,
Except (you don’t quite mention)
Your dead husbands
Whose remains were poised in midair
Trapped inside twisted steel
Puncturing two towers.

“But,” you protest, “those widows have nothing
Except an eye-slit in a burka
Whose head-to-toe modesty hides that they are
Naked of rights,
Stripped of all marital assets (now repossessed by
Their dead husband’s families).
Unable to leave the house without a man, some are
Trapped between choices to send their children to beg,
Or bend to the Taliban’s offer to feed and educate the sons.”

Victims of terrorism.

Your alchemists’ skill makes use of the
Searing heat of the Ground Zero inferno,
Smelling of death

And tempers it to the
Gentle warmth of incubators,
Giving phoenix-like birth to
New life-giving life.

Your newborn daughters
Will never know their father’s snuggling arms,
But they will know their mother’s mysterious power
That takes the heavy lead of grief
And turns it into the gold of
Hope and
Possibility.

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That takes the heavy lead of grief
And turns it into the gold of
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Possibility.

Perhaps this alchemy is a blessing from
Patti’s Catholic God or
Susan’s Jewish G-d,

All honoring the prophet Isaiah, who foretold this mystery:
“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”
Isaiah 2:4 (KJV)

With admiration from Marci & George McPhee

Or Islam’s Allah,

All honoring the prophet Isaiah, who foretold this mystery:
“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”
Isaiah 2:4 (KJV)

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