

KAREN SHENFIELD

Girls At The Well, Laughing

Still out of view,
their sandals lift
delicate dust
from the path's parched spine,

which coats shaken leaves of
ficus and acacia,
I imagine
their bare arms graze
in passing.

Laughter announces their presence,
circles like birds
the silver music of
bracelets and anklets,
as they walk, single file,

and though I lack pigments,
brush, canvas,
and the artist's trained eye,
I observe each girl as
if I were to paint her:

She's sheathed
in Gandhi's homespun —
colours coaxed from
saffron or madder.
The rope of her hair,
swings with her gait.

A circle of cloth
crowns her head,
above that,
hammered copper -
feminine curves.

I watch her balance her vessel,
recall how I stepped.
gingerly across my childhood's floor,
the hard-bound book sliding
from my head.

At the well, the girls take turns.
Hand over hand,
they haul up the clanking urn,
pour its water, cool and clear,
into pots set tenderly down
upon the ground.

Moments later —
they're gone,
leaving me alone to conjure
blue-skinned Krishna,
and the *gopi's* sacred dance,

and to think how
buried pumps, pipes, and taps
would surely spare time and pain,
but auger, too,
a loss of grace.

Karen Shenfeld is a poet, freelance writer and film researcher living in Toronto. Her poetry collection, The Law of Return, was published by Guernica Editions in 1999 and won the Canadian Jewish Book Award for Poetry in 2001. Her poetry has appeared in journals across Canada, the United States, South Africa and Bangladesh.