

BIRDS OF PARADISE

By Linda Rogers

Sometimes the carpets come down the family, from our mothers and grandmothers.

Sometimes a man comes out of a dark doorway in Turkey or Afghanistan saying, “Lady, please come in for tea!” and we buy our way out of captivity. We know better, but women who travel are curious as cats.

Curiosity is how we came to be here, in Heaven on Earth at the end of the New World, where we inherit beautiful gardens and carpets from exotic lands colonized by adventurers. We were taught to be more careful, not to take tea from strangers, not to step on native flowers, or to damage the heirloom rugs. One of our grandmothers went mad and watered the flowers on her carpets. She’d crossed boundaries, they said. Her children were beautiful, neither English nor Chinese, possibly “a touch of the tarbrush,” the bridge club ladies reported. Were they aware that their favourite game was a form

of whist played by their soldier husbands in
brothels on the far side of the Galata Bridge?

The new women gather in circles, admire
gardens and carpets improved by time,
worn down by footsteps, like the marble
stairs to the Parthenon. Seagulls fly land-
ward to break clamshells on the rocks that
guard our beaches. They cry out to one
another, the call to prayer as the Birds of
Paradise gather to gossip, "God's sip" we
learned in Sunday School, the sharing of
Proverb, and admire one another's shoes.

We drink tea and celebrate the soft leather
and delicate ankle straps, the silk flowers in
carpets our ancestors transplanted, their threads
no longer scarlet, gold, indigo, but blended
with a patina like the incandescent heads of
infants glowing in windows that look over
the water that brought us here, lighting the
way for the ones who will come after us.