

JUDITH BEVERIDGE

The View From The Monastery

from Devadatta's Poems

Whenever I grew fed up with the disputes between the farmers
and the money lenders, when I was bored with Statecraft,
I'd walk up to the foothills of the Mahabharata Range.
There I'd forget about Kapilavattu, forget how Sakiya
would always be a vassal-state to festering Kosala. I'd forget

about the frontier conflicts in the west, that the newly-
federated republics were squabbling, I'd just watch the stream
tumble into the almond groves and I'd smell the milk
and fleece from broad-horned goats. I'd stare up towards
the ice peaks, and watch the last of the sunlight

empty through the clouds like pink-tintured whey
strained through veils of cheesecloth. I'd watch stars, flakes
of garnishing silver, cover the sky as if it were a platter
of festive sweets. Here, there's nothing but the flat, iron-red plains,
clumps of earth in a marinade of yesterday's rain,

skies black as any cast iron pot. When I grow irritable
with myself, even with my own shadow, there seems nowhere
to go, nowhere to look towards - only down at my face
mirrored in my alms bowl, or at ibises scavenging, or at the moon
old as a bone, protruding from a charnel mound.