

W I L L B A D G E R

Afghani Chai

“The first time you share tea with a Balti, you are a stranger. The second time...an honored guest. The third time...you become family.”

—from *Three Cups of Tea*, by G. Mortensen and D. Oliver

Three cups of tea
they taught us (waving the book about)
a new way to win the war

With the first cup
fathers elbowed children into razor wire
to grab the Pokemon backpacks passed out like party favors,
the chai sweet and steeped
with sugar that looked like quartz

During the second cup
cricket teams from as far as Parachinar
came for the Chamkani Games
but some chai slopped over the chipped lip of my cup
soaking my shirt when
riots broke out before
conversation
did

As the spinach-like dregs of the last cup
tickled my lips
a grandfather—actually my host—stole a radio
it was hard to watch them beat him
how he bleated

The cups come from a Balti proverb, anyway.
Maybe their mountains are nice
this time of year.

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