

IFTEKHAR SAYEED

## To my Nephew, on his Fourth Birthday

What can you learn from me today  
That you won't have to find out for yourself  
Tomorrow? I can't show the way,  
And even if I could finger-post, my elf,  
Every bend and curve along the maze  
I would not; such tracks will erase  
All mystery for you to explore;  
We mustn't anticipate your future days.

You are a new soul, here among us,  
And the meaning must be clear to all;  
To be new is to be young as  
The first thoughts of a poem, not control;  
Your childhood and my middle age  
Recommend each other; the sage  
And the simple we can't tell  
And our distinctions blur this page; I rage.

Do you redeem my childhood? I  
Don't know; what's lost to memory  
Is a bird released to the sky.  
You fill the blankness I can't see.  
That you'll extend beyond my limit  
Is a thought that is its own remit  
But do not think you are extension  
Of my own finitude, the cloud beyond the summit.

We are not each other, yet  
How intimate we seem to one another;  
You know my thoughts, and then you let  
Me try and guess yours, when I want to smother  
The chuckle and the charm of love  
Which is impossible to prove  
And obvious like a caress;  
Each year our thoughts will shift to one remove.

And that is well, for that is life  
Natural; otherwise how can we know  
That the warm years have made us ripe  
In that big orchard where the mangoes grow  
And fall off to fill life's great basket?  
Therefore, we should not ask it  
That we be one, but several,  
The generations in their march to risk it.