

RAIN

We lay together on a *charpoy*, the thrum on asbestos roofs ending all days. The downpour cantillates like Sanskrit chanting we had heard at Kamakhya temple, or the one in the drenched valley of leeches and guava trees. As we gathered by Dikhow's shore, the river gravid with mud, branches and massive trunks, all flowing with a ferocity towards a cantilever bridge. Brahmaputra becomes a sea every monsoon, never settles, inundates all the elephant grass which our mahouts carefully held back on our rides. Today we wander into another summer on Lakshman Jhula where the Ganges turns green, tourists run to small motels to escape the drizzle. Some things do not change—sharing *chana dal* fritters on a railway platform by wet train tracks with steaming cardamom tea in clay cups. There is a storm expected, already the smell of rain mouses its way in like the time you cried after your mother's passing, the sky was splayed by Indra's bow. There was so much dampness the night your water broke, as we ran from the laundromat with a newspaper over our heads, the car's floor mats also soaked from a leaking heater core. And this is how I know you, on an outrigger listening to a whale song in a drizzle, breeze coursing on your face, not joyless but not joyous for anything and in its swells

flood waters pour in
a thought that the world might change
once or not at all

INTO THE MYSTERY OF RANAKPUR TEMPLE

A drumbeat in the heat, as dust scumbles
the days strung with backroads, weaving past thorny

shrub & camels on haunches. You disappear past a veil
of silence that hovers over a valley of eucalyptus, hear

a whisper but have come alone. There are a thousand
pillars, you run fingers over embroidery burdened

on stone, stand under festoons, and the flutter of flags
on the cupola. A thrum of incantations carries, as you lean

against a brick wall, urchins rush you, faces bright, unclean—
sliced guavas in slender hands and when you bite into the flesh,

you are at the end of an annual ritual: unsure what you hoped to see.
Red turbaned *rabari* men emerge from shadows and a rippling

line of women, faces hidden, arms covered in stone bangles,
hum songs you know and won't let go.

The boys disappear clambering, toss coins slicing light shafts
of moon, glinting like flames sparring with the night.

KAI PO CHHE ("I HAVE CUT YOUR KITE")

It happens most nights when lights across
the pond flare like gold globes, or red ash

and when fog becomes smoke, you think
of ghats in Varanasi, the grackle perched

on stone steps with the shine of glass and glue;
in its black eye, the image of father's calloused

hands over yours, slashed with cuts from *manjha*,
your fighter kite flapping its pied plumage, spiraling

into a yawning undertow, its bobbing wick rising
in warm air, your bare feet bruised on the brick

terrace; when all other *tukkals* plunge in a tangled
heap, and you ask how much more

the spinner could unspool, he says *As far as needed*,
and even now you cannot stop reeling.

STORY OF THE MAN WAKING UP
(a cento)

On a day like any other day,
like “yesterday or centuries before”,
dogwood blossoms drift down at evening
like the involuted tantrums of spring and summer.

I stand on the stump of a child, I cannot leave.
It is the place where I must stand and fall,
and have become like other men at forty—
more fathers than sons themselves now.

And the face of that father,
or my father through me, his legendary
head with eyes like ripening fruit
asking—are you happy?

And I, this print of mine, that has kept its color,
alive through so many cleanings; this dull null
navy I wear to work, and wear from work, and so
to my bed, and so to my grave, with no complaints.

In the clear light, I ate the day deliberately, that its tang
might quicken me all into verb, pure verb,
searching the starry sky, waiting for the world to end.
On the day of my death, there will not be a comet.

Suddenly I realize that if stepped out
of my body, I would break into blossom,
from blossom to blossom to impossible blossom,
to sweet impossible blossom.

Sources:

The Man on the Tower, Charles Rafferty; Disappearances, Vijay Seshadri; Watching Dogwood Blossoms Fall, August Kleinzahler; The Woodlot, Amy Clampitt; Easter Morning, AR Ammons; Men at forty, Donald Justice; Archaic Torso of Apollo, Rainer Maria Rilke; The Woman at Washington zoo, Randall Jarrell; Oysters, Seamus Heaney; Halley’s Comet, Stanley Kunitz; Blessing, James Wright; From Blossoms, Li-Young Lee

TRYPOPHOBIA

The closest blackhole resides in Telescopium,
invisible yet kindling with its corona of radiation.
Everything obscures to its center point
of no return. Objectively, I cannot make it out.

Deven lived with us for many summers. I was
twelve or fourteen, ignoring his practicing
the bamboo *bansuri*; how breath escapes
six holes, his long fingers closing, then lifting.

We debated whether Rajdhani Express, or Howrah Mail
was the fastest, but past Siliguri we traveled in coal
engine trains belching, pattering into long tunnels.
Does a tunnel have one or two holes?

At times how it can feel to be in a gap, a gash
in the ground where there is rock, or even a wall with
a zoetrope of names. These days and evenings are tethered
to disquietude, viral particles penetrate pores in cell

membranes. I escape a marooned city to Scarborough
Marsh, watch cormorants congregate on a white wooden board,
dark eyes gleam in the ebbing light, as they quiver
off wetness, then quietly drift into some ellipses

as if farrowing into the retreating tide. Crown crusted
virus - you must bide in this moment, spikes tense,
evaluating our deep sleep from some cryoconite maw.
When I was a little boy, each winter my mother knitted

slightly ill-fitting sweaters, with colors like blackberry,
plums or oranges, and later fearful of their moth-eaten holes.
Sifting *chapati* flour, *amma* had furrows of worry,
her vermilion *botthu* numinous like a supernova.