

Watching Indian Movies

for Minal

Too close to the screen. High pitched violins reach our ears first, speeding around in circles. It is never bright in this apartment above the Sunset Motel, always in a state of twilight that hides the dingy couch. The flat carpet brands our elbows with rough brocades. (We feel them later with the pride of new tattoos, running our fingers over thick bumpy skin.) Pierced voices seem to begin in the middle of a song. You are trying to translate for me—the mood joins itself to my ears and mixes with your words, catching up to the previous measures. The music stops, dancers and credits replaced by people smiling at a table. But the violins are not gone long, they reenter with some troublemaking character, the camera focused on his face for a long pause, notes falling down a hill and resting dramatically at the bottom. *MinAH!* Your mother's voice above our heads demands that you make your bed, but her hands are stroking my long hair, braiding and unbraiding its ends.

From This Height

In Frombork, Poland
a statue of Kopernicus stands
in front of the Cathedral
where he drew his heretic sphere.
In the courtyard there is a 500-year-old tree.
I pose for a picture, my legs
dangling like jealous roots.
In the Radziejowski tower, you can climb
a twisting staircase from the sea. From this
height, Kopernicus and Cathedral
are parts of a garden. The secret:
the world is not flat
but the Church is still around.
Humility and discovery are lovers.
Einstein knew this.

In Betlemska Kaple, a Hussite
place of worship in Prague, space
breathes like an ancestor of Protestants—
square, devoid of curves and
gold, its few faded scenes
directly drawn in pastels on its walls
like children's chalk.
I swoon for its rows of hard separate seats,
pure discipline and vow, or anti-vow.

Carl Gustav Jung once painted Ka
as a floating demonic head, with a caption that reads,
"I am he who buries the gods in gold and gems."

I just swing from tethers, I orbit,
centers numerous as stars.

Somewhere, a change

It might have happened back there,
lying on a lawn chair in the back yard,
headphones tinny with metal,
sprinkler revolving over me.
One hand lazy in the grass,
eyes closed, clouds passing for too long.

Lying on a lawn chair in the back yard,
ants crisscrossing my hand,
white lotion number ten for my face,
Hawaiian Tropic oil on my legs,
flipping with each end of a tape side.
Mother at work, father gone.
It might have happened back there.

Headphones tinny with metal,
stray cat chasing the ants,
cars without mufflers purring by—
“Hey. Nice tan.”
“What?! Oh. I mean, thanks.”
It might have happened back there,
lying on a lawn chair in the back yard.

Sprinkler revolving over me,
mind and music interrupted,
thoughts not mine, tan not mine.
Half-naked with no fence, no trees,
it might have happened back there,
flipping with each end of a tape side,
headphones tinny with metal.

One hand lazy in the grass,
the other picking up some nervous habit.
Wind colder. Eyes closed,
clouds passing for too long.

Song for I-10

Buried under the hill,
nutrients beat into bushes.
Throbbing through the gravel
these green fists, arteries
brittle, flicker
against a jagged backdrop,
volcanic stage.

A tire curls like a sleeping Lab.
Milky plastic handles
cling to cholla like spiderwebs.
Lost here: everything but
lust. A wish to straddle
the cross, holding power lines
like reins.
To feel the hum of electricity
make this road a living thing.

On this bus, everyone else
is watching the new Transformers movie
or figuring out their L.A. itinerary
and I'm just thinking how rarely
I get to be alone this long
without criticism or praise,
several miles from the shore of either
work or vacation,
neither loving nor loved,
hungry or full,
tired or restless,
winning or losing.

Methodist Breakfast

Grandpa's WASP-y kind forgiveness,
hiding place from Judgment Day.
Love, goodness, fullness, watching,
parents, choirs, "let us pray".

Pews, hymnal, carpet, mic,
hairspray, kids in scratchy clothes.
The organ's proud benevolence
unheard by ties and pantyhose.

Grape juice in plastic shot glasses
chase cubes of sheep-white bread.
Fat ladies gossip in the graveyard,
glazed donuts on their Styrofoam beds.

I'm in it for the coloring books
with robes and sandals,
magic, miracles, and candles.