

AFTER WORDS

BIBLICAL

A cautionary tale...

As if only.....

The whale hadn't been hungry,

The boat hadn't landed atop a mountain,

The bush hadn't burned,

The apple hadn't been low fruit,

My heart wasn't lost,

I hadn't come out of hiding,

hadn't fainted, failed to see the thief,

hadn't borrowed an axe,

opened my mouth, ignored my feet,

stumbled, stubbed my toe on a stone,

become a winged creature,

hadn't become a castaway,

stood up, followed the lion.

As if....

I hadn't looked back....turned...to salt.

INDIA INK

Standing in shadows,

I see her from the corner of my left eye.

As I sit on my suitcase near the edge of the station platform,

Waiting for an hours-late train, panting for a breeze,

Watching a clouded horizon,

We swim in a dreamy mirage of heat.

The platform crowds with touts selling chai, bananas, pakoras,

chanachurra, lychees, halved green coconuts,

Sweet Indian Pepsi,

With a straw to save me from dysentery.

Straw-haired barefoot boys hawk

A single square of Chiclet gum for a paisa...

A tall black-bearded turbaned Sikh shouts,

"Jao, jao",...touts scatter,

Return to surround me, hands held to hearts, pleading eyes,

"Please, memsahib...baksheesh....."

Sweat trickles between my breasts,

A long gauzy skirt clings to my wet thighs.

I see her move an inch closer, warily watching for the Sikh...

Her thin dirty sari barely covering sagging breasts,

An emaciated baby, black kohl-ringed eyes, suckles for long-dried milk...

The baby mews like a kitten as she pulls the sari to drape her head,

And hold the filthy end between betel-stained red teeth.

Clacking rails, swimming heat, I hear the train before I see

The crowded roof tops of each car.

The train screeches into the station,

Each sun-weary man and woman clutches any hand-hold.

She retreats into the shadowy station recesses.

Sits on thin haunches, lays the quiet limp baby across her thighs,

Bare cracked feet splay to hold their thin bodies.

She extends a long bony hand carefully as I offer her
A small bunch of green bananas, a green coconut...
She drinks quickly as I board the train....
The black-suited conductor shoves men aside for me to step...
to metal stairs, to a first-class car.
I take my seat, open the fly-specked window,
Watch her carefully eat a banana.
The train huffs, lurches with screeching metal...
A haze of smoke bends toward of her...
Before she disappears, she looks at me....
Her intense black eyes mesmerize me.
Heat suspends us, melts us, etches us, scarring us....
Into each other's flesh.

SERENDIPITY

Misery knocked at my door,
Despite my lack of invitation and dismissal of her plight.
She was crying at my door,
Tears streaked her dirty cheeks, mascara smudged her eyes.
But I reluctantly let her in, for some unknown reason,
And asked her to sit, have a cup of hot tea, and talk to me.
I thought, at first, she might be you...in disguise,
Seeking sympathy, perhaps, or begging for help.
I didn't recognize her, at first, and felt disgust with her tears.
She didn't speak or sit down right away,
Or remove her sodden coat, scarf and gloves.
She stood shivering in a puddle of melting snow,
Mute...
I felt disoriented, unsure what to say to her,
should I invite her to stay awhile in my house?
Then she smiled,
wiped tears and smeared make-up from her eyes with a crumpled tissue.
I gently helped her off with her wet coat and scarf.
She removed her soaked gloves and boots,
Revealing red chapped hands, broken nails,
Wet stockings and cold blue feet.
Her clothes were mere rags, moth-holed and frayed cuffs,
dirty wet hair matted close to her scalp, I could see.
She sat.
I offered her a tray basket of dry rice, riddled with pebbles and dirt.
She began to work picking rocks from rice, sorting, tossing plump grain from debris,
into a brass bowl.
She belonged nowhere, anywhere but here at my table, I thought....
A citizen of the world, speaking every language, but silent as a stone, she sat.
She remained silent, as I watched her, fixed by her
focused intensity, still wondering if she was a thief.
A slight smile crossed her lips as she sorted rocks from rice,
Carefully, methodically separating grain from dirt,
she smiled brightly at me, wiped dirt from her fingernails.
In sometime she rose and carefully replaced her chair under the table,
Scooped rocks and dirt into her pockets, bulging them.
I started to protest as she took *my rocks from my rice*.

She smiled again, shook her head, patting
Full pockets,
Left quietly out the back door...
A bowl of clean white rice,
fragrance of joy, serendipity....
She left behind for me.

NO WORDS

There are no words for love,
When words are limp,
Lifeless, stretching earnestly
To find a crease,
A crack in the universe,
The nexus
Where both worlds meet.
In the heart of the universe, surely,
There's a painter,
A singer,
A sculptor who can remove layers
Of cynicism,
Dust blown into the heart;
Can lay bare
With a guitar string,
An arching reverie,
Leaving us naked
To the bone.
Then the rare perfume
Of love
Can be inhaled.
Its juiciness,
Its ripe perfection,
Its sweetness,
Has no words...

To Virginia

Traveling, I've idled,
Contemplated future
And past,
Loitered on street corners,
Under trees,
On the steps of temples,
And synagogues,
Fertilized marigolds,
Followed the dip of the stream,
Baked berry pies,
Cut off my nose,
Spited my face,
Stumbled over iron ore,
Panned for gold,
You called it fusion....
I call it alchemy....
The mystery of grace.

