

## Dipping into Florence

Down my destiny, into eternity, I jump the cobblestones of time.  
At the footsteps of Santa Felicita Church, in Florence, Italy,  
after a day of piazzas and chapels, we sit down, asking for rest.  
We throw bits of margherita pizza in the air,  
landing on an unseen trail. The pigeons with whistling wings,  
descend to their destiny, pecking away, their heartbeats, a singing sestina.

Strolling down the Ponte Vecchio, holding hands, singing sestinas,  
lovers passing by, their laughter bringing delight at a time  
when quails and partridges flap their wings,  
touching the ruffled waves of the Arno River. Italy—  
O land of passion fruit and peonies sweet scenting the air,  
are now in the fluttering pages of a brochure lying beside me as I rest.

The sky dusks and the shadows grow long and hard after a restful  
Siesta; I see balloons of fiesta when ballet dancers bound to a sestina  
“Whispering Tuscany.” Adoration fills the air.  
Sipping whiskey, wrapping my fork with fettuccine, I capture the rapture of old times  
under the moon-lit skies showering their bounty, as we experience the spirit of Italy.  
Just then our little girl dances afloat with wind beneath her wings!

And we swerve with the turns and bends of her wings,  
through the crowded markets of Firenze, jostling around as the rest  
of the town is calm. What a charm, this oasis of life in Italy!  
Our feet merrily springing, hands swinging, sweet carvings of a sestina.  
La, la, la. Cave paintings, moonwalking, precious times  
ring, we catch her bouncing, sprinkling mischief into the air.

Shavings of Renaissance art spill in the surrounding air.  
I gaze deeply into his bewitching blue eyes, wings  
of romance flying through the Duomo, the terra-cotta tiled dome, and out, in a timeless  
marvel. We spot Michelangelo’s *David*, stoically resting  
on mundane moments dusted with life in a spirited sestina.  
Such are the whimsies of a time away from home, in the spangles of Italy.

In the foothills of Tuscany, Italy,  
we have a revival, a rendezvous with Florence, the air  
fills with seedlings of kisses, saplings of sestinas,  
countless heartbeats of pulsating birds, their wings  
carry us to destinations unseen. Oh, my traveling mind needs rest  
from dipping into tourists’ dreams of lives gone to the curvature of time.

One magnificent spring, our jubilant spirits take us to Italy atop an airplane's wings.  
The air in Florence, crisp and clear, we wake up refreshed after many moments of rest,  
splashing into the unknown sestinas of life, marveling the beauty of passing time.

## **Finding Life**

Embedded Buddha uplifted by the roots of a tree,  
just like the robust forces that set me free.  
Confused and contorted,  
I was almost dead. Now the mind is opening and there are few tears  
to shed. Still life, still images, still have a life,  
whether it is Buddha's life or mine.

On a journey to Ayutthaya, Thailand, we venture to find life. As if it is mine,  
the Bang Pa-In Summer Palace stands, surrounded by lakes and trees.  
Gold to resplendent red, the rich colors inside the palace blend with the King's life.  
The west to east escapade, meeting Mom, crossing seven seas, we are free  
in Bang Pa's world. Touching the pillars, gazing into shiny ceilings, it is a tearful  
twist of time. We breathe royal sighs, our minds free from contortions.

I capture the silhouette of my mother overlooking the bridge, untangling the contortions  
in her hair. But my camera does not catch her cheery spirit tumbling down, as mine  
rises, leaping from leaf to leaf on treetops. Time freezes as there are tears  
trickling down my cheeks, and dew drops glistening on the trees.  
In the name of Bang Pa-In Palace, we experience moments of a free  
becoming when dancing flamingos splash water on us, this moment, this life.

Swept away, we are in awe, reflecting upon the journey, the life.  
We stop by the massive 14th century reclining Buddha, still beyond contortions.  
A serene mind, a restful body in those restless times, an orange scarf freely  
curling down the contours of his gorgeous torso, escaping imperfections, as mine  
evanesce into fumes of nothing like green leaves detaching from jostling trees.  
This day, our travels to Ayutthaya end, I wipe away my joyful tears.

With a Cambodian woman at Angkor Vat, I share glances, her child wailing, in tears.  
I muse, we must help; we must nourish; we must nurture the realms of life.  
Under the swaying shades of the "strangler figs," the trees  
and temples chime as we exchange reveries facing the barks of writhing contortions.  
I see the sign. For centuries to come, we will be one, this life will be yours and mine.  
Such, I hope is the story between countries and cultures, healing gaps, breaking free...

On a breathtaking trip to Thailand, we embrace peace in the land of the free.  
At the Buddha temples my feet amble, my mind freezes, I shed streams of tears.  
Imaginary jewels and marbles flicker on my  
crown like I am a shrine mingling with Lord Vishnu riding on the Garuda, life  
seems good. The secularity inspires me: "All Gods are one," ripping contorted,  
archaic notions. The world is at peace, singing and dancing with its humans, animals, and trees.

One free and splendid spring, my mother and I journey to Asian temples, and life.  
We are in tears as our spirit of inquiry opens the hungry skies, releasing contortions,  
pouring rain and harmony. Oh, my. Our minds are calm and so are the swaying temple trees.

## When Eyes Meet Eyes

Passing by the scenic mountains and serene valleys of Dana Point, California, we arrive at the quaint inn, amid fountains and sprawling green aisles, stepping on the sands, facing the ruffled waves of the Pacific Ocean under a hazy sunset for the wedding of our family friend Chris and Asha, his bride-to-be. Excited to be a part of the wedding, we adorn ourselves in resplendent South Indian style, colorful silk and satin waving on our figures, a traditional ensemble of jewelry and attires.

Flaps and folds of *Kancheevaram* silk layering the contours of our bodies, our attires generously complemented with doses of pure, dazzling gold. Enchanted, I point to the shiny squiggles bouncing off *bindis* and bracelets and the gold paisley motifs on the stylish clutch bags. Heaven had bestowed its bountiful beauty on the aisles of the earth, just as the flower girl sprinkles petals of rose on her way. What a becoming! Chris whispering *shlokas*, prayers to Asha's ear, as the priest chants, looking at the setting sun.

My daughter and I twirl in our *pavadai-dhavanis*, silky, flowing skirts and sunny blouses for the *mehendi* ceremony, a party where henna tattoos ornament arms. Our rich attires accentuated by minimally thin silver bangles touching and *tinging*, begetting luster and love in dainty arms, matching the ringing temple bells. Pointing with her tattooed finger, she sings "Ring, ting, ting!" and shakes her tiny hips down the aisle. They serve us mango lassi and crumbles of *papadam* with papaya sauce, in style.

Sixteen years ago, in the foothills of Chennai, we exchanged garlands of jasmine in style, we were in love. On the swing, sitting side by side, we held hands and prayed to the Sun God. Mizzling us with milk and mustard *laddoos*, balls to rid evil, they welcomed us to the aisle. My mother draped me in a vermilion red, nine-yards saree and my husband's attire was a simple silk wrap, the *veshti*. I wore the goddess's bejeweled bun, *aandal kondai*, pointing away from my head. Amid the wedding fire, blessed in godly aura, we were meant to be.

So heavenly is the union of man and woman, two bodies and souls coming close, becoming one. We all danced in circles in *Kummi*, singing, clapping, celebrating a marriage in style, spirits sharing the goodness from one being to another: a special bond for life. At every point *diyas*, lit oil lamps greeted us, our new beginnings sanctified by the awakening rays of the sun. A sweet union, even today, eternal musky scents of trust emanate from our wedding attires, we happily recollect those moments, the dance, the romance resonating in the pillars and aisles...

Is this a dream? I reminisce about eyes first meeting eyes amid the wet boulders and aisles of Mackinac Island. Our first kiss, heartbeats, holding hands, becoming one. Our long drives; we giggle like the sound of falling coins, I admire his charming attire, gaze into his hazel eyes...entangled in love. Our relationship blossoming in style. In a quaint country cottage, we made a home, our bond blessed with abundant sunshine. We weave in endearment, celebrating many years in the game of love, winning many points.

Walking down the grassy aisles graced with petals or soaking in tradition, in style,  
becoming a beloved partner takes love and trust. Must-haves for a marriage green and sunny.  
Wearing gorgeous silky attires, the perfect pair, we sail through the undulating points of life.

## Oodles of *Pudina*

When oodles of *pudina* bloom in our yard,  
we walk by the mountainous long, mint esplanades,  
plucking the green leaves in big overflowing baskets.  
We fry them with chipotle, then drizzle with tamarind and spices,  
throw coconut shavings in and whisk ‘em all in a blender  
making a fine, delectable paste called *pudina* chutney.

Bathing in a mélange of flavors, mustard seeds and *urad* lentils, this chutney  
is a mashing of all the bygone battles, the cryptic maladies surrounding the yard  
of life. We throw the anger, the agony, and the *pudina* in the blender,  
transforming the mint from its place of birth, the winding esplanades  
to the kitchen, a culinary paradise, with the tantalizing aroma of spices.  
Pulverized by blades of wisdom, the ensemble spills from the blender to basket.

“Let me adorn with this fresh paint, this benediction of the gorgeous green,” says the basket.  
Let us come together and put an end to hate, let us make love in this chutney.  
After all we have all the ingredients, starting with the spices,  
to the mint leaves religiously plucked from the sprawling yard.  
The gestating womb that bore the leaves, roots that suck the nutrition in this esplanade  
of life, are now resting and soothing their leafless wonder, the leaves themselves in the blender.

Anointed with sesame oil, fried in a mystical mixture, into the blender,  
the bed of minty expressions is carried to the kitchen in a basketful  
of love. The evergreen mint of the garden, the esplanade’s  
birthing, an overpowering scent, the cool display of charm enlivens the chutney.  
Bathed in the reverie of coconut, we transform the mint foliage from the bearings of the yard,  
to the beckoning of the smoky, salty southern spices.

On this journey, the mint is brimming with a lingering array of spices  
and the green gooey wonder, all in the blender,  
with the chef’s eye and juxtaposition of senses we don’t see in the yard.  
The music, the rhythm, the medley, the dancing love from the basket  
that move to a glass urn containing the chutney.  
How they must miss their free life, their fresh yearnings, their green grassy esplanade.

An onlooker’s summer paradise, this minty esplanade,  
the hidden beetles perching on the blades of grass, the becoming of the spicy  
mint. Do you like wafting in the wind or mingling into a pickled chutney?  
Even the strange eccentricities of life resolve in the pool of fiery peppers in the blender.  
The chutney on the countertop is the essence of *pudina* in the basket  
as the scent of its bouquet lingers through our open alleys, through the back of the yard.

From the grassy esplanades of the Carolina mountains, we pluck mint leaves, blend them, exotic spices creaming the chutney. The fragrance of mint flakes, and oh the basket dripping mashed leaves into a sumptuous chutney, born from the hidden wonders in the yard.



## A Mermaid's Sestina

I am sailing the seven seas with my hand-crafted sestinas.  
A mermaid, I swerve and flip my tail tangling an end word.  
A coral reef, an oyster, or even a sequestered seaweed, or the tail of a whale  
comes my way and begs for attention.  
There is a mingling of seams in the turbulent waves of the ocean.  
I touch, I bend, in this eerie world, I ascend, making amends.

A poet, my mythical body of a woman bearing a fish-like tail, makes amends  
for the tribulations of life and the joys of writing a sestina.  
I swim, I cry, spilling a story in the middle of the ocean.  
Splashing my imagination, my body pumping word after word.  
The princess, the fish, the fusion, all at once asking for attention.  
Since you ask, I will comply, says the lengthy poem, the mighty whale.

Once I know the end word for each line, I can jiggle along, having a whale  
of a time, weaving with words, making amends  
for their differences, swerving along, seeking attention.  
After all, this is a grueling journey, a saga of the sestina—  
there is no end to emotion or the twisting of words  
as I squiggle through, splashing in the insurmountable ocean.

Moving on to abandoned alleys of deep desert lands from the oceans,  
where elephants are now the new mighty whales.  
My sweltering sestina wriggles on the shores of yesterday, the words  
create fresh paths, making amends  
for lost directions. The dunes of the desert summon this sestina  
riding atop the elephant's trunk, trumpeting for attention.

Don't the unique phrases undulating on the elephant's trunk deserve attention?  
Be it the sandy dunes of the desert or the ruffled waves of the ocean,  
I now dream of humming a singsong, just as the sestina  
quenches the thirst of elephants, the mighty whales  
of the land. Treading away, amending  
the ways of nature, I build a new stanza, studded with rhythmic words.

Tuning to the rhythms, configuring words,  
this master of poems is bathing in recovery drawing attention  
as the poem flows. "Let it flow," "let it go," make amends,  
savor the rustic scents while whiffing the oceanic  
breeze ease past the thumping elephants and flexing whales.  
"Congratulations on the journey!" I whisper, holding aloft my sestinas.

It takes words and wonders to murmur to a mermaid spinning a poem in the rugged ocean,  
paying close attention to the rocks and rigors in the ambitious journey of whales,  
mermaids, and poets. We make amends for an onerous poetic form, singing a seamless sestina.