

Neera Kashyap

## Choices

Everything hurts -  
craters on the roads, mob lynching,  
hate speeches, misogyny, searing heat, caste wars  
clogged drains, cheerful beggars, farmers' distress,  
daylight murders, predators hidden and at large.  
What hurts worse is the higher concentration within  
of shame at not being popular,  
the stress before a performance,  
the despair of feeling a hoax... a hoax,  
the anger at not being good enough  
for my father whom I sometimes wish  
never was  
my father,  
yet is,  
insatiably.  
What osmosis?  
What bleeding water will push these concentrations up to the sun  
to flower?  
And we talk about freewill.

## Migrant

There is no difference  
between hate here and hate there -  
permeable borders full of bloodlet.  
Only justice here seems more stable  
like an old bewigged  
judge, heavy-jowled and frowning  
booming out his judgment from some statutory ritual practice,  
not the practice of persecution and ethnic cleansing  
of an older world  
but the ritual practice of ethics, law, prison terms.

It doesn't hold on the street.

He felt like a stalker, but maybe not.  
Maybe it's his image that gets refracted into a spectrum of similar others.

Steely indifference, at best; snarling hostility, at worst.

He stood ghostly white, waiting for me at a rubbish bin.  
 I couldn't change my steps, they led straight to him.  
 He stuck out a finger shaped from his pocket like a gun.  
 Snarled, "Go on, get going, fucker - rubbish to rubbish"  
 and held up the lid.  
 The stench hit me only when he had slouched away,  
 hands deep in a leather jacket,  
 turning back to leer, "black rubbish, yellow....it don't matter."

My hands still tremble, my heart races still.  
 I have learned to wait for them to settle a little.  
 My wry query:  
 "Hey, what's with you, heart? And you, hands? Hey, slow down,  
 sl...ow.....down.....sl..ow down....down".  
 I go with the pain,  
 but also with the image of smashing the white ghost's head into the rubbish bin,  
 of throwing a rock at him as he leers away with cocky assurance.  
 As if he was the one in control.  
 But this doesn't stop the heart hammer nor the hand tremor.  
 So I go for, "What's with you, heart? Slow down.....slow, easy."  
 I see my defeat, my reaction; see the ghost's hatred, sense of victory.  
 My pain, his hatred.... are already less, this seeing, this not wrestling  
 with the noose around my neck.  
 Someday, maybe...  
 I won't be led towards the rubbish bin.  
 Maybe I will walk away, knowing that *he needs* to rubbish me to feel winner.  
 No compulsion, just this seeing, not much more.  
 Like seeing on a screen images of fire and blood that will soon fade.

## About the Poet

Neera Kashyap has worked as a newspaper journalist, as researcher and editor on environment and health, and as social and health communications specialist. She has published a book for young adults with Rupa & Co. titled *Daring to Dream*, 2003 and contributed to five prize-winning anthologies published by Children's Book Trust. As a literary writer of creative essays, poems and short fiction, her work has appeared in various online and print literary journals in south Asia including Papercuts, Kitaab International, Out of Print journal & Blog, Earthen Lamp Journal, The Bombay Literary Magazine, Indian Review, Muse India and Mountain Path. Her short fiction is forthcoming in Sahitya Akademi's Indian Literature. She lives in Delhi.