

Rochelle Potkar

Departure

See how he wilted as soon as she left.
He grew a silver stubble - deserts on skin, as soon as she left.

The water ran out of sinks.
The house grew reed thin, as soon as she left.

The flowers turned twigs, the puppy skeletal,
roaches gained freedom, rats ran amok, as soon as she left.

The country turned alien, borders anti-national.
Clouds and planets lost their names as soon as she left.

Her body oozed virulence from every chasm.
And I, *Saanjh*, seamed her with cotton, fervor, and good riddance as soon as she left.

Frog, postmoderne

Of primordial legacies
as old as myoclonic jerks, dusk fears,
in our bodies, the dread is memories.

In a post-modern tale, the
innate fear of the frog is not of reptiles,
imprints from primate ancestors... as much as
hunted by the witch of society.
For mental disorders, foreign fads,

our frog has to come out again and again,
so he goes back again and again
into the bedroom of the princess.

The concern not of extinction,
mutilation, immobilization
...at the edge of the pond,
he always made razor-sharp decisions,

but the scare of separation

identity crisis of a hidden prince

a curse longer than three nights
loss of self, abandonment
humiliation, shame...
and the wizard's ways of keeping names.

Our frog has no gay icon
for a lover's kiss
so many cannot turn prince,
caught with another frog in bed
through the princesses' spy cam.

Drop a ball into this pond
the princess kisses the unwilling frog.

The dread of disintegration, and in another version
the frog is thrown against a wall to break the spell,
and in yet another – a Russian one:
Prince Ivan Tsarevich discovers a female frog
who comes out again and again
to become Vasilisa - the Wise, female sorceress.

In modern tales,
the staying in is more important
with phobias of prosecution, discrimination,
repercussions, violence

not ancestors' inheritance, whose love did not ensnare
the mesh of bodies to form other meshes
disrepair... despair.

In his pond,
the frog catches a reflection
of gods making love - fire and moon - Agni and Soma,
and Kaartikeya born of Shiva and Agni,

Mitra and Varuna, waxing and waning as two half-moons,
and King Bhagiratha born of two vulvas,
who brought down later to its plains, the Ganga.

In the 13th-century Jayadratha's Haracaritacintamani,
elephant-headed Malini swallows Parvati's
menstrual blood that flows in the Ganga
to give birth to
our obstacle-vanquisher, Ganesha.

But when science experiments use electric shocks
to impinge apprehension in mice
we see generations

of little mice-grandchildren
growing up with the fear of the smell of
(you guessed it...)
... cherry blossoms.

That's why our frog breathes also through his skin.

Love

Late in the evenings when the forest grew sounds,
the smell of rain on dung, jungle of danger,
he kept arsenal in green -
raw blood and just-alive meat.

A man with a heart - he loved animals.
Off a spinning hunt and new game,
he watched them through his binoculars.

The forest guards sleeping...

A leopard played with a boy's carcass
through his camera-on-terrain.
He killed it in spite, roasted, and ate it.
No dogs came near him after that.
An unusual smell coming off him.

The forest guards, sleeping...

A forest official once asked for buffalo horn,
sent him to kill bovine.
He killed its baby too,
his head and stomach churning.
Until came a new forest-range officer,
who told him of the role of every
animal in the ecosystem.

He gave up hunting, and began
tranquilizing rogue elephants
for a living.

But when it rained,
the gates of the forest broke.
Villagers turned away by floods
became hunters and poachers again, like him.

They wouldn't have gone to danger
but forest-protection officials grew hungry
for a taste of rare meat

every now and then.

The forest guards, sleeping...

Prey

When the girl of 13 got obsessed
with the perfume of victory,
she waited outside an eagle's nest
before its chicklet flew
into the daring empyrean.

Her imagination etched against
barb-wired flesh wounds in a family of nomads,
where only men, for generations, hunted eagles
- the parade of sameness against the triumph of doyenne.

She now stands atop an unsound mountain
training her golden eaglet for the Ulgii festival
to the tremulous gasps of traditions.

And after the breaking of records, winning of competitions,
travels with her father into Mongolia's harsh winter for her eaglet
to kill its first fox,
so they can all return like raven, rocky mountains against
the amaranthine skyline seen after a deep night's dream.

About the Poet

An alumna of Iowa's International Writing Program (2015), and Charles Wallace Writer's fellowship (2017), Rochelle Potkar is the author of *The Arithmetic of Breasts and Other Stories*, *Four Degrees of Separation*, *Paper Asylum*. Her poems *The girl from Lal Bazaar* was shortlisted for the Gregory O' Donoghue International Poetry Prize, 2018; *Place* won an honorable mention at Asian Cha's Auditory Cortex; *Skirt* was made into a poetry film by Philippa Collie Cousins for the Visible Poetry Project; *To Daraza* won the 2018 Norton Girault Literary Prize in poetry; *War Specials* won 1st Runner up at The Great Indian Poetry Contest 2018; *Amber* won a place in Hongkong's Proverse Poetry Prize 2018 Anthology. Winner of the 2016 Open Road Review contest for *The leaves of the deodar*, her story *Chit Mahal (The Enclave)* appeared in *The Best of Asian Short Stories*, Kitaab International. Rochelle has read her poetry in India, Bali, Iowa, Stirling, Glasgow, Hongkong, Ukraine, Hungary, and the Gold

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