

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/2

Sankar Roy

Sense of Direction

There was a time when
Lord K and I could easily tell which direction
was south—towards the lotus pond
where bubbles pop up on the surface
as if someone breathes from the bottom.
North was where the vixens used to cry

from behind the terracotta temple shrouded in neem.
Neem's tiny leaves whispered in the wind
to a night bird that searched for the castle
where a fiend kept a princess captive.

West meant open pampas
where god combed the earth's grassy hair
while the sun paddled at day's end.

Now, all we can say east is where we lost our childhood.

Detachable Soul

Lord K can leave behind his sack
of flesh and blood like crumpled night clothes
and go out for a walk.

Trees tremble,
clapping leaves like palms: *Come on,*
you can do it, it's not that hard.

Cobwebs hang from sky. There is rust in the air.
Lord K bends his head first, leans
the way a shadow would lean forward.

Pure as light, no pigments, no heat,
Lord K's soul no longer requires a fixed path.
Anticipating his journey,

countless birds somersault,
clouds link with each other
to provide him a map.

School Work

I want to go back to that warm night
when, sitting on the floor, I was doing my school work,
memorizing a moving verse

composed by an ancient Sanskrit poet
when Lord K's fiancé was preparing herself
for her date with Lord K.

I felt sweat dripping from my forehead
onto the open page as she took a shower
in rose water. I felt thirsty

when she adorned her hair with jasmine.
She sat on the floor to color her toenails,
I sensed another mosquito bite on my chest.

My ears were warm, my nose too,
as she raised her arms and placed
a gold necklace on her neck.

I imagined her breasts trembling a little in anticipation
of Lord K's arrival. By the time
she was ready to change into an olive robe,

I almost died from the stuffiness of the air.

Duty to Protect the Flame

Lord K lights a candle in an empty room and leaves.
Before he goes he urges me to protect the flame.

He cautions me if the flame dies
it may not be good. I do not know

what he means when he says that it may not be good.
I am afraid I won't be able to keep the flame alive

in the strong breeze
coming through open windows.

I fear a storm is forming as it is getting darker outside.
The candle's flame is the only light I have.

I do not know if Lord K will ever return.
He didn't tell me. If the flame dies, I am scared

the earth will sink into darkness.
I hear a commotion outside—a siren, a scream.

The flame is etching shapes on the walls
of the empty room—a face, a tree

and then a swirl of broken lights.