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Diminuendo, Coasts, Buddha Morning

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alive with lichen and bright violet verbena,
 I climbed, not stepping on one petal,
 to the rim where I raised
 my single wing feather
 and waited.

For the first time, I witnessed earth
 as painful host, not much hope
 for some grand galactic raptor
 stooping to pick the globe clean. Out of nowhere
 I caught myself wishing for such
 heroic stroke, softly brushed
 my fingertips across the blossoming
 tufts of downy verbena at my side,
 and understood the mother owl
 as mother earth, yearning,
 within orbit and soar,
 to rid themselves of me for good.

Pramila Venkateswaran

Diminuendo

I had imagined the drama of my parents' separation:
 suitcases stuffed with mother's saris, my dresses,
 tattered Tamil magazines, silverware, and photos
 lined up at the door; mother had sent the maid
 to fetch the taxi. Soon we were on a train, speeding
 to grandma's. At every episode, I changed the ending.

In each story mother had the last word,
 while father sulked behind a locked door.
 The future belonged in parental litanies, not
 in my vocabulary inked with my heart's hell.
 I didn't know loss weighed like a gold coin
 in the bottom of your chest. Nor had I seen
 the battleground smeared with women's stories.
 I lived in the dramatic moment, where vengeance
 triumphed. Heroes and victims had definable faces.

Each time I pressed her to smash the invisible walls,
 the treatises on femaleness became palpable in the air
 we breathed – the letters rose up sternly, subduing
 our bold eyes with their dazzle. One banner read *kadamai*,
 duty, another read *nanri*, gratitude.

Mother sighed, you're right. Be a darling and
 take the clothes to the laundry on your way to school.

Coasts

At sundown, nature acts in slow motion:
 Herring gulls float down like ballerinas,
 the pleats of their skirts falling in place
 as they balance claw-tips on waves stretching
 toward rocks with tai-chi slowness.

The sun is steadily licked and placed half-eaten
 on the edge of a plate. Buoys stand like candles
 on rippled cloth, weak against the black globes
 entering strokes of flame.

I say to a woman who loves the sea, "Coasts are so different. I lived on one where the sea was angry for months, then calmed down in winter."

Candles shimmer against beach plum, fierce in their final effort. Mosquitoes come out in full force, dancing in our faces now in shadow. Her red lips smile, "It's time to go back in. We'll cede to the tenacious."

Buddha Morning

When I see stringy ochre leaves shiver outside my window, shadows under my eyes lift and fly away. I am fully awake to the pale green wash behind the lace, and my senses fill with syllables as liquid threads of light begin to stream into bowls of sharp leaves that had held lavender rhododendrons.

I love this morning's quiet, the dappled sun creeping through curtain folds, slipping like silk over the futon, the table with its writing tablet, and the dark fountain pen lying across it; even the white walls subdue their whiteness.

In such light, I am attentive to the provocation of dried violets, the roughness of parched fronds stuck fashionably in a fragile, eggshell vase; the petunias on the window are by contrast a demure pink, sleepy at this hour, while I begin to rhyme with the yellow butterfly that flutters past, free and full of life, outside.

This morning is a Buddha, ready to lend itself to me, but my heavy hand is unable to place the pen at its feet.