

Jennifer Anderson

A Man in Love With e-Kerala (India)

The tour guide made me watch his eyes
to see what most would show with a hand,
a spotted deer with horns
an adorned temple elephant,
a blue tarp under women weaving baskets,
a cove of coconut trees.

I hated watching his eyes,
his hand refusing to point
or nudge or move at all.

What I'd say
when his eyes shifted,
and he'd look again
without perking his chin
or raising his eyebrows.

A bird skimming the mossy water
with its crooked beak.
And then an arch of a back,
a brown, bony arched back,
a man washing his body
in mossy water,
a bird skimming near his mundu
that bobbed by his head.

The washing man could not see
the adorned elephant. His eyes swim
under water, not pointing to a cove
of coconut trees.

This man's eyes were buried
in a cove of coconut trees
that rained on him at night,
bowling balls dropping from branches
to the blue tarp he slept on.

I stopped watching the guide's eyes that day,
ones that pointed to tourist temples
and literacy rate billboards but skimmed

past a bony man able to read Laaza bar wrappers
he stuffed under his head at night—
his back, like the crooked beak of a bird,
grinding against the ground.

What My Daughter Will Learn At School

One day, when I am married
to an Indian named Herbert,
and our child is in the fourth grade,
she'll come home, and slump
at the kitchen table, fist squishing
her left cheek toward her eye.

I'll ask her what she learned that day,
and she'll look up and say it slowly:

A...

B...

C...

D.

I'll start to sing *E, F, G,*

but then I'll see nine years of Grandma
Idamma's tears, collected in a bottle
that I drank before her birth, rolling
down our child's big Belgian cheeks.

I'll hear my girlfriends' voices in my head,
how we imagined this day:

*Your child won't be an American Born
Confused Desi, they'd say.
She'll just be an American.*

I'll know she will never *just* be an American,
her curried fork, Indian dresses she wears
with jeans, a grandfather
with a name she can't pronounce.

*Think of it this way, I'll tell her.
Once a year we get to see elephants
outside the Detroit Zoo,*

*your story books become real,
and your Grandmother speaks words
that only your tears understand.*