

Sreejith Varma

Sakuntala¹

A tree stretches out its branches to my windowpane,
and I imagine I saw Sakuntala beneath it.
I close the book and keep it on my table
bare, but for my penholder on its edge
and walk to the window thinking how
the world mimics the book.

Closer as I look, wiping my glasses which
suddenly became moist, I also see
a jasmine creeper climbing up
the tree behind you. Like
another girl vying for
the same man's love.

What is it that connects us both?
My ill-kept vows or the token lost
To etch me back on my Love's memory?

Something moves and I turn
around and see her eyes, rheumy,
chestnut. And a shuddering
stranger looks back.

Note

1. Sakuntala is the heroine of the classic Sanskrit play *Abhijnanasakuntalam* by Kalidasa. Sakuntala, lost in thoughts about her husband King Dushyanta, was cursed by Sage Durvasa for being a negligent host when he visited her hermitage. When she begged for forgiveness, Durvasa said that the curse according to which the man she had been thinking about would forget her would be undone when she showed him her "token" (a ring) of recognition. When she reached King Dushyanta's palace, he could not recognize her as she had lost her ring in a lake. After a lot of suspense, Dushyanta is later reunited with Sakuntala.