

Siddhartha Gigoo

The Tourist

She returns from her old land, empty-handed, once again.
At the airport, they ask: “You have no luggage? No belongings?
You bring nothing, no souvenir?”

“I have this bag...”

“Where? What is in it?”

“A tattered bag,
full of stories and songs,
woven by my ancestors,
but long since forgotten,
abandoned by the shade of a weeping willow
on the bank of the river flowing through my childhood.”

“Stories and songs?”

“I stole them from the hollow smiles of decrepit men and women,
and from their mute conversations; dreams still play mischief
under their leaden eyelids;

they wait,

and fall asleep, keeping vigil
over their rootless descendants.”

“Anything to declare?”

“Can I take these stories with me
and paint the naked walls of my new home
with their forlorn shadows?”

At home, she surveys the yawning corners of her room.

A vacant mantelpiece: “Unburden me from the dilapidated memory
of your eternal past.”

An empty photo frame: “Have you brought a picture for me?

A picture of your loves and adventures in the distant land!”

A shriek echoes off the wall.

The phone rings.

“How was your holiday?”

Grandmother hums her song: “I am here.
I am here, draped in auburn creepers.”