

Lopamudra Basu

## Seeking My Father's Twin

At my sister's wedding,  
long after I had left the city,  
I saw him from afar  
silently arranging the chairs under the canopy  
seldom making eye contact,  
not coming forward to bless the newlyweds,  
not claiming the rights of an elder uncle  
still breathing and moving,  
yet already a ghost.

When asked how many siblings they were  
they sometimes counted him  
and sometimes forgot,  
especially if they had to say,  
what each brother or sister did for a living,  
Not easy to talk of a twin  
without a high school certificate,  
working odd jobs, first a steady wage  
at a printing press, then declining to day laborer  
a night watchman, a guard,  
a helping hand in a store,  
a twin for whom the loss of youth did not bring  
the rotundity of midlife comfort.

When he died two years ago,  
alone in a room at the sweet shop he had slept in  
I wanted to remember some pieces of childhood.  
No conversations came back to me;  
perhaps there had not been any.  
I only remembered his unpredictable visits  
to our house in Behala,  
eating quickly from a plate heaped with rice and fish stew,  
sitting shirtless in the heat of the humid sun  
taking a bucket bath with a piece of pink Lifebuoy soap,  
by the well, in the open courtyard,  
wrapped in a thin towel,  
his hairy back, glistening, wet in the sunlight,  
then, drenched in talcum powder

leaving after the day,  
my father's old shirt,  
almost fitting his frame,  
transient balm for festering wounds:  
lacerations begun at birth from the same womb  
a few minutes apart, widening into  
unbridged chasms of separate destinies,  
flowing on different streams  
no longer feeling the other's body  
in the dark wetness of amniotic waters,  
no longer hearing the heart of a twin.