

Poems from **Raw Silk** (TriQuarterly Books/ Northwestern University Press, 2004)

Ancestors

They are bicycling into the sun.
He has a dhoti on under his coat
and a briefcase with LYRIC
marked in big letters.

She has a sari in lime green
and socks and a backpack
that is filled with scraps
of torn silk

She drops a fan as she
races past the balustrade
into sky blue water.
The fan opens

and slips into the shape
an oyster makes when
it whorls a pearl.
Something of great price

is torn from her and the man
on his bicycle who is wheeling
at the edge of the crater
cannot see or hear

Soon as the poet had it
they will be pecked to death
by a partridge. Soon they will drop
into dark water.

Rumours for an Immigrant

1. Fifth Avenue Plaza

Water slips down a concrete wall.

In the plaza, she touches a metal table, a chair, a notebook.

Noon already. Each thing swallows its own shadow
murmuring, I cannot flee you.

She loosens her hair, becomes a woman in a silk sari
on a high balcony, the trellis cut in bone.

Rumours clip the air, spread their wings
and swarm through the plaza.

Suddenly she feels hot.

Draws her hair back, a comb glistens in her hand.

She pulls out a pocket mirror puckers her lips.

She tries to make small scale order

(two black eyes, dark skin, two nostrils,
that sort of thing) out of bristling confusion.

2. Central Park

From mouth to shining mouth news darts.
In fields by the river indigo burns.

Gandhi enters Central Park, smoke in his palms.
He raises a charka, a dove coos, fluttering out of his dhoti.

Behind him, pots and pans lashed to bicycle rickshaws,
come the people.

There is no homeland anymore
all nations are abolished, a young man cries.

In the lake rumours flicker, make luminous habitation.
Allen Ginsberg leaps from the reeds

holding hands with a young man from Conakry,
dead already, turned into a star,

shot 41 times by police as he stood in his own doorway.
Gently loiter, he sings.

On his charka Gandhi strums a tune:
I stop somewhere, waiting for you.

3. Notebook

She has heard the rumour no one will have a homeland.

She opens up her notebook.

She wants to flee her past.

She thinks she can live on the white page.

Wo ist Heimat?

She murmurs this in a tongue she does not understand.

Wen Beitak? Naad evida?

Sitting very straight she writes in her best hand:

I have floated on the river Spree.

Seen Brecht's Theatre from the outside in.

Tucked my body into two suitcases,
with a hole cut between,

hung in a museum at Checkpoint Charlie.

Tired suddenly she stops writing, rubs her wrist.

4. Bodies and Souls

Three months ago she met a man with a hurt wrist.

He used to live not far from Mohenjadaró.

In her notebook she speaks to him:

I come from where Marco Polo turned.

As for Mohenjadarro, it is covered in dirt.

The invisible cities burn in me.

Here come under my ribs.

She claps her hand to her lips

lest the wind turn this into a rumour

that reaches Gandhi's ears.

She whispers the immigrant's name

adds, in her mother tongue *Ende priyen!*

She feels all her days and nights are etched

on his lonely skin

in script so exquisite and spare

no one has deciphered it.

In time she will be to him as the air he breathes

so he forgets her utterly

yet his mouth will be tucked to her ear,

marking a wild rose, her raw lips to his wrist.