

Letting Go

My grief was short lived
When you died three months short
Of your hundredth birthday.
There was no breast-beating
As you gave in to fate, leaving
Behind a sense of relief
Almost and an album
Of hinged memories.

That milestone of a century
Would have been a celebration,
But for you only a moment
Of bemusement, wondering
If the fuss was about a grandson's
Impending engagement or yet
Another birth in our growing family.

We were all present, respectful
Of a long life devoid of bad blood
And unforgiven transgressions;
Just the crackle and warmth
Of the clouds of ash, incense,
Camphor and a verse of scripture
Rising to a union with the heavens.

Cottage Industry

He's gone native,
Into origami and embroidery,
Pottery from local clay, puppetry,
Kite making, wooden toys,
And paintings from raw
Vegetable dyes.
He sleeps in the shade
Of oyster-shell windowpanes.

Spun cotton weaves
Through the assembly line
Of his fingers. He has called
It a day with those chimneys
In paddy fields smoking
Into the sky like cigarettes
And to iron and steel
Reddening in foundries.

He has no interest left even
In the clucking of cyberspace.
He listens all night
Instead for the beat
Of the butterfly's wings

Heralding the storm.

Touch

Trolled into despair, he turned
To his notebook made of paper.
He shut down his system, tapped
Nostalgically on his Remington,
Doodled in the margins of newspapers,
Lost himself in the op art of crossword puzzles
And in such passions as ceramics,
Bonsai and calligraphy.

He turned his back formally
On those bleeps and blimps
And found solace in cutting up
A fresh lemon into sunrise,
The leaves of lettuce into frilly
Handkerchiefs. He playfully
Lopped off the phallic heads
Of mushrooms, the court jester's
Cap of the aubergine, caressed
The concealed weapons in roses,
The silky down of Kiwi fruit.
He basked in the iridescent spotlight
Of the dragonfly on his
Fingertip and in the hummingbird's

Standing ovation.

Crime of Passion

Her gods at odds with his own,
He remembers that last
Broken glance, her eyes
Red over garlands
Exchanged with a stranger,
The showers of coloured rice,
The rustle of silk and chiffon,
The daggers drawn of vengeful,
Shortchanged in-laws
As she was led
Away by trumpets and drums
From fire

To fire.

He can still feel the flames
Of the funeral as he stood
At a banished distance.

His vengeance was sweet
Though the summer heat
Now hangs heavy as a shroud.
He kneels on the bare floor.
Over his dry eyes
The shadow of
The scaffold

Is a cross.

Cocktails

I thought his name was Mehta till
Told (meaningfully) it was Mushtaq.
I felt a closer bond with him then,
More so when he introduced me
To his wife Sita whose brother Bharat
Was married to Clara D'Silva
From Goa, her older sister
To Amarjit Singh from Patiala.
Her first cousin Agnelo recently
Toasted his tenth wedding anniversary
With his beloved Meher Pestonji
And their sons Samuel and Bobby.
To mark the occasion I cooked
Up a melting pot of khichdi
And served some heady cocktails
Of wine, country whiskey and brandy.