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Arkava Das /

**glossolia**

held together by compassion by lashings, silver keels split into eyes, patrols roll out the sea, a use-repeating mother, face buried in waves, zona hatching missiles to lift a patois of sick, *divers would wrestle a net, under glass leaves*

join an ivory hinge to vortices of ill-will. i want you circulating at my feet like a snail's, the straits of Magellani, Silicone at your breast. we eat the flesh of *parrots white, red, green and black.* العالم في الضرب تحاك التي المحمومة طائر ظهر على الليلة كل النوم من أسـتبقظ.

[i wake up every night on the back of a frantic bird that hatched swiping at the world]

Will Cordeiro /

*Madhouse*

The architecture sidles off, each stone like cloudwork. False bottoms and trapdoors, the whole contraption clanks along. The gears with tiny teeth keep chewing up the intricate machine. We're all fed up. Oh sure, I've been a king once, too, a bird, a belle, a ball. I'm throned among a kingdom of portable chairs. Our quibbles daily rearrange and disappear. Down the hall, faces pressed as if under glass. Each side the bars, a mutable TV. Visitors surrender documents, open zip-ups for their scans, reach skyward for the warden's pat-downs. We're surrounded for miles by the crush of air; all of us with that sinking in our guts like cities falling slowly into a sea. Joking, we call it our nutshell, our shellshock. Why, yes, now that you ask—it *is* a scream. Loudspeakers crackle for us to maintain order, ardor, ordure, or who can tell? The border-guards cackle at the errors. Out on the ledge, just fluffing, the ornery buzzards in their aerie blink. Outside's another intake of your breath away. Child-like, we totter the courtyard on this bright spring day, the sunlight as blonde, as blind as rapture. We trip out into our own museums.



Dion De Souza /



## On MV Wisdom\*

At 175 metres and 9,000 tonnes  
it's like something out of a sci-fi movie,  
something that's drifted out of the screen

and stranded on the shores of our everyday lives.

It's made a movie set out of our environs  
with the masses flocking in in lakhs, unruly  
in their eagerness to catch a glimpse

of the derelict vessel, festooning the sand with filth.

The hull towers above the beach  
above the children and youngsters squealing  
as they lurch and sway on Ferris wheels, bubbles, balloons

and junk food aromas wavering through the humid air.

The ship's propellers buried in the sand.  
A crew hovering about the deck—not yet fully  
phantom. Ropes dangling from the bow and stern;

the cops' shrill whistles.

So far, there's been three  
aborted attempts to heave the ship off the beach and on,  
finally onward to the scrap yard (where cutting torches

and winches will whittle it down to size), three

casualties (two youths and a man who dreamed of  
touching the rusted ship but got sucked away  
by terrible currents—the sea and wind sloughing

off the passionate surrender of their good sense, lives).

People, fascinated, linger along the security cordon,  
over stamped tar balls, round a sand sculpture of the vessel;  
marvel at the transient beauty, click snaps,

scatter coins.





*\*On 12 June 2011, the 26-year-old cargo ship MV Wisdom, after breaking away from its tow ship, drifted onto Juhu beach, where it remained for nearly three weeks, turning overnight into a sort of tourist attraction, before finally being hauled away by tug boats on 2 July 2011.*



## **In the World's Afterlight**

*(after the painting by Jehangir Sabavala)*

This is one way in which the world may go out,  
layered with light—  
a composed blaze—  
and six shadowy shapes  
stumbling through the thick of it.

Faceless, cloaks swishing  
over the gently sloping ground,  
they pilgrim toward a horizon  
swept with mellow magnificence,  
slowly diffusing into the unknown

(out of which they emerged), and for us—  
(possibly) unknowable.

*Dion de Souza currently edits the research of others while pursuing his own research at Mumbai University. He attempts to craft both interesting short fiction and poetry. His work has been featured in Kavya Bharati.*

They were white. When they first came into our view, they were faint. Many of us would quail to see them because unlike the other elements they were unsettled. They were always clattering, and we, by way of response, were always seeking shelter from them. Fastening the latches, blowing out the fires, sealing our mouths and ears for fear that they might seep in; distraught that they might touch us. This wouldn't imply that they were unsightly. No. Not at all. Far from it. They were fetching in fact. If you looked at them from the corner of your eye, you would notice how mesmerizing they really were. I however, would never confess or bear witness to their beauty. Neither would any of the others because although they were entirely enchanting they were also entirely new. So new that they were anonymous; and in those days, to concede that the unknown could be alluring was a liberty that belonged only to seers and prophets.

I was no seer. I was an ordinary woman.

Once, on a peculiar whim I extended my hand out through the window to touch them. That very instant the sweeping winds betrayed me, and my weakling fate, it trickled down. The white specks spurned my fingers and spiralled instead towards the bellowing face of the determinate cliff that stood as my clan's guardian.

The wisest amongst us were on tenterhooks, bewildered at their presence. The unthinking contrarily were grateful for their arrival. I was among the latter. We didn't have much else to keep ourselves absorbed until they came. We'd gathered, hunted, built, settled, protected, mastered, communicated, identified and even conquered the most blood-thirsty covetings that flourished on the insides of our skins. Our lives had turned languid with each successive victory, placid with each realization, and sparser with each act of self-discipline.

The only thing beyond our ambit then was the one conundrum of death. In the enthusiasm of our early days we'd misapprehended it for a form of sleep. In fact, when for three changes of sunlight a man had slumbered in the same spot, it stoked none of our curiosity. With the sun turning red for the fourth time however we began observing him. Weeds had sprouted out at the rims of his mouth. Sprawling garlands of waxy black flowers emerged from the fingernails on both his hands embracing the length and breadth of his posture. Tufts of azure leaves buried him beneath their stolid weight.

Seers came in. They suggested nine restoratives to wake him up- the men-folk were called upon to shave their heads bald, expecting women were bathed in honey, nigella seeds were sprinkled at the entrance of each house, menstruating women were called upon to collect their blood in pots, dogs were fed on bulbous fruits, the black flowers were plucked out from his nails and soaked in milk, a virgin was called upon to guard him at nights, a lone child was made to climb up the cliff each day at the break of light, and all of were collected sang, chanted and hummed as they sky would close its doors on daylight. The restoratives failed however and we realized that it wasn't the animals alone who would die.

Days changed into the colour of mourning, skies grew thick and impenetrable. The cliff we worshipped too changed expression. As the knowledge of death settled upon our minds, we grew restless. We began talking. Prior to this discovery we would speak only when it was urgent, or indispensable, but not anymore. We were bantering all the time, as though talking more than necessary would drown altogether the howling ever-present reminders of death. We also began clasping and collecting things in our houses- objects, people and secrets, holding onto them tightly,

afraid that letting go symbolized separation. At the slightest provocation we would wail like thundering clouds. As days went by things became names and names became things.

It was then that these white specks made their invasion. They brought with themselves the powers of speculation and the powers of curiosity. They were a lot like snow. Except that they travelled either horizontally or in spirals, and were never alone. Minute white clumps with an iridescent centre. When they moved forward they made a faint swish sound. When they touched a hard object they sounded like tip-tapping drops. They seemed to be talking with one another. Always. As though they were captivated in a fierce debate or as though they were sucked into some densely layered secret.

Some thought they might be seasonal. Others prophesied they were grains of death that had come to get each one of us. I disagreed with the latter suggestion. I liked them. But sometimes my own mind came to be fogged with an uneasy foreboding. We developed different beliefs about them each one thinking that our own belief was more absolute than that of another. Which is why, after they arrived we never stopped talking. Talking about them.

We never got accustomed to them as we had earlier to many other occurrences and absurdities. We would duck down with fright when they approached our bodies. When the men left for work they would plait our hands with those of our children just so that we wouldn't mistakenly touch them. My husband did it too. But the slithering invitations of their undiscovered bodies were as colossal as the fear of them. I would gaze at them untiringly. Gaze as though I were inherently aware of what they had brought into this world. But I wasn't. Not then. Once, when nobody was looking I had unwound the links between my hands and those of my children, and had held it out against the seething winds that were carrying them towards me. But my weakling fate it was. They gave my hands a skip.

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My shoulders seemed heavier that evening than usual. So did my eyelids. The blood had been incessant. Wherever I walked or sat I left behind beads of red. My body were weeping. I remember clearly. Like glutinous beads of red.

The men were far off when the miracle occurred. We women were sitting together, singing a song in praise of the cliff, a song in praise of the creator of the cliff,

“la eeeayyy aaaa eaaaa aaaaaaaa mmmm

la eeeayyy aaaa eaaaa aaaaaaaa mmmm”.

The children were with us too.

The white particles appeared. They revolved around us, gently, with the nimbleness of dancers as though they could listen to our song and partake of it. Some of the women returned to their houses and secured the doors. Others plugged their ears.

I closed my eyes. My eyelids were heavy. I remember. When I opened them the specks had broken loose. They had disintegrated.

A little child, about as tall as a shrub began walking towards them. Her face was cadaverous. Her eyes were deeply sunken and black. Her mother was nowhere to be seen. Perhaps she had no mother. In her expression she resembled the man who had died. Our singing grew louder. None of us reached out to protect her. None of us intervened. Divinity itself seemed to have compelled her. She touched them. As she touched them they disappeared. She did not die. She did not fall asleep.

She began speaking, speaking simultaneously of the sun's unfailing fury, of the anxiety of seas, of the evening sky's unrequited love, of the fertility of flowers, of guilt-ridden clouds, of self-deprecating sunsets, of winter's bitterness, of a stifling old lady, of a sea-horse that was blessed, of scarlet yearnings. At first when she spoke we thought it was delirium. But she spoke long hours. She was possessed we thought. She was a soothsayer. But as she kept unfolding one thing after another we grew attuned to the lyricism of her speech. She had no message to give. Only lines full of words. As she unwound them, they reverberated in the pits of the cliff that stood before us; they reverberated in the pits of our own repressed experiences. Listening to her relieved us. When the men returned they collected around her too. She had no message to give. Only a story to tell. A performance. This is the first story she told us.

*Asma Ladha, is a twenty-six year old from Mumbai. "The Storyteller Chronicle" is the first part of a continuous series. Her poetry has been published in an anthology titled "Kavikala" and a journal called "Reading Hour".*

**Ben Nardollilli /**

**Stirring the Strife**

She says she likes the fights  
In bars, not for the show  
Of strength or a way to decide  
Who is better to go home with,  
But for the change that falls  
To the floor when bodies fly.

We're not that different I tell her,  
We both make use of the pain  
And suffering of other people,  
It might as well do some good,  
I get my stories to write,  
She gets money for the bus.

Neither of us feels guilty,  
A witness deserves something  
To compensate them too,  
We both agree we have to find  
An ivory dealer for the two of us,  
A shame to waste all these teeth.

## A Second to Last

Stories come up from this planet,  
The moon is just a boot,  
Spare place to hide some change,  
Its creatures do nothing,  
They bring back and recall only weak  
Nostalgia for various projects.

The earth holds enough of a creature  
In the woods at nighttime,  
The mountains and hills in daylight  
Are a bonus treasured,  
The planet has other living things,  
But the landscapes breathe before them.

*Ben is a twenty-six year old writer currently living in Arlington, Virginia. His work has appeared in Perigee Magazine, Red Fez, One Ghana One Voice, Caper Literary Journal, Quail Bell Magazine, Elimae, Super Arrow, Grey Sparrow Journal, Pear Noir, Rabbit Catastrophe Review, and Yes Poetry. Recently, a chapbook of his, Common Symptoms of an Enduring Chill Explained, has been published by Folded Word Press. He maintains a blog at [mirrorsponge.blogspot.com](http://mirrorsponge.blogspot.com) and is looking to publish his first novel.*

Richard Luftig /

### Bach's Lunch

I

Each morning Maria Barbara  
would make it contrapuntally  
with day old bread,  
a bit of cheese, the barest

slice of wurst. Perhaps

a single beer snuck in  
the church behind  
the backs of priests.

II

Requiems. At least one  
each month. How sad  
having to depend on death  
to make your living,

and all the while wishing  
for time to compose  
a gigue, perhaps a gavotte  
in C, the one hopeful key.

III

Sarabande, the saddest dance.  
She is gone and he never  
knew. To return alone  
to all those empty

mouths to feed. No repast  
just more futile  
fugues—no future  
save for more of now.

*Richard is a professor of educational psychology and special education at Miami University in Ohio. He is a recipient of the Cincinnati Post-Corbett Foundation Award for Literature and a semi-finalist for the Emily Dickinson Society Award. His poems have appeared in numerous literary journals in the United States and internationally in Japan, Canada, Australia, Europe, Thailand, Hong Kong and India. His third chapbook was published by Dos Madres Press.*