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Jerrold Yam

Anniversary of Leaves

Each year I prepare fortnights by raking
in skin, littering their vagabond bodies
to melt through pavements, convinced
that consistency buries no sympathy
for judgment. Thistles too are barred
from chasing a temperate freedom,
every climb trimmed with homeward
glances, indulgent bows recalling how
an arc away, the sun's autobiography is
no writing on a wing. Maybe you were
right—*we live in rituals* like days
cleaved from flocks of wayward winters,
moments unstrung as tribute to seasons
endured before. Outside, only pieces
of sky stiffening like a wound, tracks
pointing opposite ways, newspapers caught
in the clasp of ripening snow.

Having recently completed National Service in Singapore, Jerrold will be pursuing undergraduate Law at University College London in September 2012. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Ceriph, Moving Words 2011 : A Poetry Anthology, Quarterly Literary Review Singapore, Softlow, The Substation Love Letters Project and Symbol.

Joshua Wiley

Tariq

The flags were flying the day Tariq arrived at Emerald Point. It was only a week earlier he'd escaped from a downtown skyscraper and emptied all the accounts, turned in the keys, wiped the hard drives clean. On a ferry across the Sea of Cortez he met a woman with fake breasts and faded tattoos and they hardly spoke when they spent the night together. He never got her name. The coast was clear all the way down. A few humpbacks blowing beyond the sand bar, the occasional soldier looking under his trunk, tapping his door panels. He had to take a detour to Guadalajara, but it wasn't as far as he'd thought.

The beach was deserted. Across the bay there were fireworks at night, celebrating president Juarez's birthday, but the recession, drought, and violence in Acapulco had slowed the economy to a crawl. Nonetheless, the grounds were immaculate: palms framed in sharp hedges, swimming pools with intricate tile work, and all the villas climbing up the hill. The jetty was dappled with Pelicans, the horizon with fishing boats and yachts.

Tariq's room was Spartan yet luxurious. High ceilings, geckos peeking over the window ledges, a balcony with a view of the harbor, a modem and a router and a freezer and a fridge. Sink, stove, shower, sofa. He tried calling Britt over the Internet but she didn't pick up. He did some push ups and went early to bed.

The sun shone brightly. The warm sea, stretching out to the horizon, full of snapper and tuna, oysters and shrimp, was in a sense the same sea which beat against the arid shores of revolution in the land Tariq had long ago left behind. He watched Gaddafi on Riz Khan, his robes immaculate, his turban taught, his glasses without a scratch. How long had it been since the OPEC hijackers landed in Tripoli? Since Dhaka rebelled against Islamabad? And if it was the same sea, in what sense? What sort of sameness? And the water which flowed round San Quentin, or passed through the straights of Kowloon, was this too the same?

Water ran from the gardener's hose. An accordion echoed down the promenade. The occasional coconut fell. He was sitting on the balcony drinking tea and listening to the radio when there was a knock at the door. He turned the radio off and put a shirt on. The man at the door wore a pinstripe suit and moustache. He handed Tariq a letter and lit a Pall Mall. After reading, Tariq walked to the table, got the envelope and the truck keys, handed them over to the mustachioed man, and gestured to the vehicle. He saw the man out of sight before closing the door.

A girl in filthy clothes got on the bus Tariq rode into town. She played a steel string guitar with a high action and sang beautifully in a high register. He gave her a coin before she got off and disappeared into the parking lot of a Mega. An enormous cruise ship was docked across the highway from the bullfighting arena. Tariq watched the sunset through the scratched and graffitied glass of the bus window. Heavily armed police sped by in pickups. A dog was nursing her pups beneath a roadside billboard.

There was a lift, a tram of sorts, running up the center of Emerald Point like a spine. Tariq stood on the concrete stairs and watched the counterweight go by, then the cab, which carried a woman and man so tan the whites of their eyes shone like lights. At the tram's bottom was a cantina where an odd collection of foreigners sat drinking mescal. They regarded Tariq with a certain existential friendliness, outwardly wary, even cold, at least indifferent, yet charged with an understanding he couldn't place. Something in the movement of the lines around mouths and eyes. The brushing of hair from foreheads. A buggy motored along the shore collecting the kelp left rotting by the high tide.

He walked, sweating in the sun, the shadows of frigate birds crossing the sand. A giant man with wild, curly hair smoked on a veranda, and as Tariq passed the man raised two fingers, not a peace sign but the

same fingers. Tariq returned the gesture and stopped, thinking the other meant to initiate some interaction but he stood still, silent, too far away for proper eye contact but still intimate somehow. A little further on an old Civic was parked at the edge of a lot with a fresh foundation on it, rebar reaching up. A couple sat on the hood kissing. One man had his hand in the other's pants. An eel was rotting on the rocks. A grip of boats were gathered by a small pier and the scales and tables of a fish market were scattered beneath a large tin roof. In the plaza next door a bunch of kids played hide and seek. There wasn't an adult in sight.

That night Tariq called Britt again. This time he left a message, one of those messages people leave when they don't really have anything to say. He pictured her listening to it in the dark of her apartment in Tribeca, city lights shimmering out the big windows, double panned to block the city noise, cleaned once a week by men with families in other countries. He did push ups and sit ups and ran on the beach. The next night he went to a circus he'd seen from the bus. There were camels and miniature horses. A smell of burning trash wafted through the trapeze tent. Someone asked Tariq where he was from. He pretended not to understand. He watched the dawn from his balcony and for the first time in years he cried. He didn't assess value to the event, it wasn't good or bad, but his life, everything he had been, was changing, and nothing could change that.

He fell asleep on the beach. The waves pounded steadily in the morning wind. Water trickled down the rocks of a little draw. Explosions of red flowers burst from the packed clay cliffs above the sand. Scattered driftwood cracked and grayed all around him. The clicking of the oystermen's hammers drifted with dry palm fronds to brush against his sides. The sea shimmered with white light. Far out, in the mist, a ship bobbed up and down in the swell. It carried people. People with ideas, with stories. Tariq's future could be on that boat.

In his dream he heard the clacking of a train leaving Lahore, the old mail line to Delhi. He saw two men on a bicycle, weaving between the busses, trucks, auto-rickshaws and taxis of a crowded street. His brothers. The younger chewing betel nut, spitting the red juice into the dusty street. He saw Britt on the Staten Island Ferry, going to see her grandmother on Sunday. He saw the rock-strewn hills around Mount Kailash and then the peak, mythic home of Shiva, emerging from the clouds.

He had trouble sleeping nights. He walked around, bare feet on the cool tile floor. He read the Reforma. A cockroach rested beside his kettle. He drew. A homeless man on a park bench. Horses on the track. There was a large iguana which spent the day just outside his front door. When he walked in or out it scuttled aside and looked back at him.

The church was lit up in amber and gold and white against the deep blue of the night. Five stories above the divergence of roads to Tepic and Bara de Navidad, the tiles were cool and clean-cut couples looked down from their balconies at low-riders bumping the Ghostbusters theme. Gay bars and highway cars were still humming. Humpback whales were flipping in the bay at sundown. In Yalapa, horses trotted the path to the waterfall, longhairs peddled watsu and weed. The water-taxis bumped over the wakes of tanker. Richard Burton's voice echoed off the cliffs.

Tariq walked the cobblestone hills. Selma sold shoes and skinny jeans in the gay quarter. Busses to Boca de Tomatlán. Who lives in those houses high on the hills, at the end of private drives? He sat in the zócalo with the pigeons. The church was cool at the end of the day, quiet during siesta, until more candles were lit. Then, suddenly, he heard it, a sort of hum welling up, not just from the Internet cafes but from the planet itself. That point at which intricate complexity becomes homogenous, of course, that's a matter of perspective, what looks like a solid field from afar can be quiet different close up, and so it is with the very fabric of the cosmos, for artists and scientists and politicians alike.

The amber lamps along the beachfront malecón glowed sepia in the warm night air. Tariq sat on the stucco siding of a bridge. A sailboat crossed the setting sun. The food stalls at night were heavy with the aroma of chorizo and menudo. Soap operas flickered on small sets, people sat around on small plastic stools watching, licking lime from their fingers. In the cool of the Oxxo Tariq looked over row after row of Jumex

and Dos Equis, Red Bull and Arizona. He had the same gaze now for shelves of food as he did for a naked woman, or the evening news, or a taxi accident. Behind the counter, Cazadores and Jimador. A muttering bum bought a plastic jug of mescal for dreams. The sand was soft beneath Tariq's feet. He closed his eyes.

Britt jogged past Madeleine Albright's house, carried her Washington Post by the Turkish embassy, wondering what sort of deals were being made behind heavy doors. She cycled to work, and after, to yoga, dinner in her loft with a cat and March Madness. Even in that last moment before sleep, there's no abstraction. She is addicted to the consistency, the stability of her values and signifiers and subsequent pursuits. She no longer chases the new, nor does she wonder what might have been.

Tariq does not desire the new, he does not choose perpetual change, he makes no decision at all, he covets the new like he breathes air, drinks water. Like his brain tells his legs to walk, one foot in front of the other. But in being everywhere, everything, he is also nowhere, nothing, still there are constant elements, and he comes to cherish them. The brushing of teeth, drinking water, cooking rice. He is so small he almost disappears.

It was after midnight when he woke and turned on the television. Charlie Chaplin flickered across the screen, sleeping in a bunker underwater with a phonograph horn for a snorkel. The air had finally cooled with the deepening of the darkness, and he paced circles around his room, splashed water on his face, poured a little Nescafe powder and tap water into a glass and drank it off at a draught. The curtains swayed slightly in the breeze; he stepped outside and looked down at the street, still alive on Saint Patrick's Day night, the spring equinox and Juarez's birthday approaching. The guys across the airshaft and one floor down were on their balcony talking, about the threat of nuclear fallout from Japan. Their faces blurred. They were traveling from the north, one from Villahermosa and one from Chihuahua. They were headed to Colon. He couldn't discern why.

The Chaplin film bathed his stucco walls in an undulating mint light, so liquid and modern it seemed it might conjure a spirit from the future, open a vortex or a portal of some sort. He smoked. Low riders bumping the Ghostbusters theme and riot police plied the street. Kids on spring break. He walked down to the lobby. The water cooler bubbled as the concierge filled a thermos. A woman sat in front of a laptop with headphones and a microphone, video conferencing with others far away.

Tariq walked on the beach one last time. Some Italian women were sunbathing, makeup bags and Ipods at their sides. They smiled, he smiled. He imagined the life they could have had together. He wondered what other life he would be imagining if he had lived that life, with those beautiful women, a family, a home. The flags were flying the day he left town.

Joshua Wiley is a writer from the USA.

Pranoo Deshraj

Stillness

Movement disappoints.
Do you see shadows
drifting to new owners
They mock in falling company.
Feel the word on your tongue instead.

Woman. An image appears
cupping a nipple in each hand.
or perhaps the hair.
Yes, eyes rover into the secret of origin.

Mother, suddenly.
Feel the word turn its sides over on your throat
The axis shifts from oranges
Man, then.
Where the hybrid explosion of disbelief?
Where the oars of crossing over?
Take both forms. Exchange them for new ones.

Feel the word drip its meaning over threads
All these ways of getting you to look
At a soiled cloth.
I preach the pacifism of tidiness
over a typhoon that won't cover
the dead ideally.

Pranoo has recently finished her masters' from English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She lives in both Hyderabad and Mumbai.

Saksham Khosla

Ghazals

Nostalgia, beheaded. Idols scattered in terrified heaps outside the shrines of this land.
Below dawns streaked with blood and ink, ablutions were performed with the crimes of this land.

Despite the neatness of exile, I swirl past massacres into breakfast tea.
For a prologue to Hell, look no further than the pantomimes of this land.

What further belief will they amputate tonight, Ghalib?
They have made an infidel of me, a Palestine of this land.

The betrayal of prayers tore open bigger wounds.
Is that why the riots needed to Partition the time of this land?

Inshallah, may the dregs of past empires salve these wounds.
Such are the little games; the pastimes of this land.

The old revolutionaries have bandaged their palms.
They are the refugees of temples, drawing the blurred lines of this land.

"At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps," – the cry of the wounded gazelle
storms "the solemn moment." Deserts continue to invade; led by the dusty spines of this land.

These are Saksham's experiments with infidelity.
Wine has assailed the last minaret; I have come to believe the lies of this land.

The cartography of sighing comes naturally to speech.
Tonight I write the obituary of speech.

The Taj Mahal has interrogated itself into dust.
Desire's bleached bones narrate the history of speech.

After all was ash, I smeared the pyre upon my shoulders.
Crushed pain's outlines into an obscenity of speech.

Around the candle, an exodus of Selves. The Other immolated with wine.
Let the death of the mushaira be its elegy to speech.

Across continents, I have succeeded in reclaiming memory.
Entombed, all I lack is the familiar calligraphy of speech.

O Yaar, your glances are metonyms tailored for diyas.
Under the full moon, on Diwali, we'll see who owns the aristocracy of speech.

In place of the Yamuna, Delhi was flooded with sehnsucht.
There is some left over. Allow me to add it to the chutney of speech.

Saksham, had you not superimposed a city over the heart,
the Beloved may have forgiven you for your incapability of speech.

Demand

It was the usual protest at Jantar Mantar.
The monkeys and the beggar-women
sat arrayed in concentric circles.

The langurs demanded government jobs
in return for biting off the city's sin every dusk
(primary targets included jilted lovers and the nouveau riche);
work they had been performing for the past seven generations.

The women – some immortal, some balanced
precariously on caste lines –
complained bitterly of the bad crop this winter.
Each of them had given birth to exactly two
tall, dark and handsome men
who had at once applied to British universities.

I was seated in the center of this colosseum,
this postcolonial tamasha.
The sundial refracted our tired ghosts
into tea and lentils.

I nodded at the gurdwara in the distance,
began to chide the natives for their
petty narratives in my taut English –
but it was missing.
One of the little chootiyas must have
stolen it. Why?

Hanuman, sitting cross-legged beside me,
leaned in for a conspiratorial whisper.
"Ah, but how else
can the subaltern speak?"

For the Grandfathers

To peel them from their confusion
with newspapers, their stubborn politics,
is a crime akin to subtracting

the muezzin's call
slipped in black envelopes,
sealed with bone

from the blue bled dawns
that dismantle a baser God
for another.

Their tongues are ribbons –
slit open on wills,
knotted into wrinkled gasps.

I am split across their spectacles
swung askew from ears
and I will never know

the smoothness of minarets.