

Hauntings with Wild Figs

All our yesterdays dyed in the turmeric,
you're everywhere. Your family name,

Pillay, smiles gently, even from the peeling
shop fronts in museum photographs. I haunt

the framed streets of your old neighbourhood
and a phantom hand takes my life in cold Tamil.

I'm from myself apart – someone else's story –
chapters from Madras to Pondicherry.

Half-forgotten works roll over for a kiss
beneath the dust covers of my heart.

Now in sepia saris and dhotis,
what a past dances across the pub table.

You've become a boy again,
sitting in a wild fig tree in a glass of wine.

I want to taste you.

Hidden away in you is the semi-sweetness

of the answer to everything.

But, in verso flame, your spirit escapes me.

Through the window there's a low wall
that holds back the fig

and semen flavours of the sea.

Ghost Husbandry

Mei's dead children – two miscarried,
one at the age of weaning –

went to live in the chrysanthemum
blossoms near the moon gate.

When she first noticed them there
she wept and laughed with joy.

The little ones cried for milk
so she fetched her flute

and played songs for them, offering
tales of Aunty Piety the fox,

Eggborn, and the mountains.

The three boys fell asleep,

curled up above the country of flowers,
in nests of chrysanthemum clouds.

Now she goes on gardening faithfully,
even when her husband

takes a new bride – such slapping
and howls behind walls of rice paper.

Marriage Season

Her engagement ring is a crystal ball –
it glitters like a parallel universe.
They say no two are ever alike.

So she marries one, moves into her husband
the snowflake. Paired down,
she imagines her male crystal

comprises the enormity of Eurasia.
Dreamily, she consults with Baba Yaga,
admits that she too has a mortar,

keeps herself in muffs and sables,
takes the baby driving – hear the sleigh bells –
beneath the onion domes.

She enjoys the consoling iconostasis,
that gold beaten through church architecture.
The wolves howl their obeisance –

appear to run away.
Apparently the Steppes are an easy flight
to any heaven you can fancy.

Then the snowflake husband melts,
becomes a teardrop on the rose window.
She retraces herself through the prism,

notices the snowflake pattern
on her baby son's mittens. The choir breathes in,
reserving the rights to every hymn.

Living in the Land of Folklore

I remember when Rapunzel
lived with Aladdin,
magical lanterns alight in her hair,
and Goldilocks was Sindbad's lover —
so tenderly he took off her dress,
and blew her porridge cold.
Then he went away to sea
to found a heavier city of gold.

A jack-in-the-box drowned
my friend and my phoenix both,
like Henny Penny foxes, on boxing day
but Julnar consoled me –
though the Old Man of the Sea
stole the ebony horse's joystick,
and thought nothing of blowing
my hat and the goose girl
over the daisy hills and far away.

I loved you, City of the Magic Horses,
where firewood could turn into people
and people could turn into birds,
where Falada breathed *heartbreak*

even when he was dead, and Julnar
was the lovely Pomegranate of the Sea.

On her feet were sandals of sea glass
and she walked along a field of myrrh.