

## 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.