

First Night

Danielle Besch

"See Mumbai the beautiful, with this map being helpful!"

from a tourist map

The Hotel Grant is crumbling
on your first night in Mumbai.
The taxi wallah kept your change,
but you don't know that yet.
It will be weeks before you understand
the exchange rate, the way things work
here, where the chai does not come iced
or sweet, and the rickshaws crowd
even your sleep.

On your first night in Mumbai,
you weep in the shower, beat
your fists against the geyser, and repeat:
"It's not bad, just different.
Not bad, just different."
Not bad like the curry that scorches your tongue,
or the deadly stench of fish
and beggars, or the Delhi Belly
that ravages your body.
Not bad like the mattresses,
as flat as the nasal voices of Bollywood
actresses, or the assaulting scent
of Ganapati flowers, and the popping
skulls on funeral pyres
on your first night in Mumbai.

You don't know this yet,
but on your last night in Mumbai,
you will cry because you know
how you will miss
fairytale elephants in the street,
naan dripping with ghee,
the barefoot children who greeted
you with happy Namastes,
brilliant saris and sparkling bhindis,
tablas and finger cymbals, all of it
dancing with you on the trains
on your first night in Mumbai.

Summer Sweet Corn

Danielle Besch

My daddy tills the soil
in the backyard. He wants
to grow a garden, to bury
seeds bursting with promise,
to work his fingers deep
into the ground and plant
life there. Pink and dusty
seeds go into the earth.
He tends to them
in the dusk and the dew,
water flowing daily
from hoses, fertilizer packed
tightly around prickly stalks.
Soon, they stand three feet
high and I delight
in the first sweet bite
of summer, in hot butter
dripping over juicy kernels,
and grin at my father,
on his knees in the garden,
preparing for the next season.

Matthew 27:46

Danielle Besch

She makes sacrifices at the kitchen
sink, scrubbing away last night's

leftovers that we carelessly left caked to dinner plates.
She wipes our transgressions clean from pure white

china, and lets them run down the drain
with nothing to say. No reprimand issued,

though we promised just the day
before to always rinse away the remains,

the mealy crumbs of communion and the congealed
grease of our gluttony. She would be justified

to lash out in anger at us, to point her finger
in blame. Instead, she just scrubs

and seeing her there, with shoulders thrust
back against inevitable pain, and varicose veins

on the calves of her legs, I decide
that tomorrow, I will wash the dishes for once.