



**Priya Sarukkai Chabria**

*The Twilight Is Yellow*

Observe the magenta sepals of the lotus bud streaked with slime. It is late dawn. Pale pollen stippled petals are opening over trembling water. The performance has begun. The eye strokes the page with the intimacy of reading Braille, lingering over each detail. Notice the outlines are drawn with a single squirrel hair brush; the line is delicate but firm, demarcating an inside (translucent first light) and an outside (dark water) which you hope is your reflection. The face of the lotus is looking up at you looking down at it, the way you look down on certain things and certain people though the flowers' fuzzy gold centre hints at potential that you can't or won't see -- like wheeling star clusters during daytime. The downward glance at lotuses, fish swimming in lacy rivers, the lynched people lying on pavements, leaden gutters is the first or bottommost register in a miniature painting. All that's below is propped up for a better view, like a newborn's head and neck is lifted to show its crumpled mauve face. Like you prop yourself all through life so that your neck doesn't snap. You hover above the setting, supported by fear and perhaps a smidgeon of boredom, to avoid being contaminated. Touch is lethal.

You know the second register. The middle ground, of being face-to-face with life yet dodging it as you pass a durbar in a world capital or a ghetto of which there are many in the eight holy directions. You scroll through the daily malaise that is ever new and predictable as rosy fingered Eos. He, the painter and he, the dreamer and you know how the narrative will end, even for you. You're resigned to it, so you tell yourself. In truth you pretend the middle ground doesn't

exist as you awaken, your eyelids fluttering blank frames of evasion, exploration, forgetting. But something is wrong. Something wails – perhaps it's the opal elephant rampaging through a palace courtyard, scattering courtiers and chasseurs towards gateways and ramparts; perhaps it's the hissing woman in that corner carmine room on her crimson bed, her hair and limbs pin-wheeled against the congealing blood of her wayward lover; perhaps it's the siren of an ambulance entombed in traffic just behind your car. You try to flee though you are immobile in God's theatre, Srirangam, sri-arangam, where he dreams this small heartless play. The curtain is always up, the terrain is always strewn with star shadows. Your eyes fill with the gloaming of an eclipse but you aren't hushed enough to notice the stirring around you so it doesn't imprint on the wet cement of your heart.

A ribbon of Krishna blue and smoke curled with gilt edged clouds of lighter hue floats at the top as the scene's third register. Below this, pronged lightning. Below which pairs of egrets, tiny yellow beaks open against the wedge of white wings, lift towards thunderheads and you wonder why they fly into a gale instead of cowering in the palmyra fronds that tousle the sky; you wonder why he created such a narrow strip of heaven when you long for boundlessness.

You want things to fit and form patterns even if they are broken, like the jangling glass pieces inside a kaleidoscope that, when rotated, make and remake endless and profuse designs. This gives a remote solace, the kind you experience when considering Polar wander.

But you are forgetting the ruination that you already are, you, all of you, every cell: your right arm is that tree, your left arm the car parked beneath over which it will crash to become a sculpture of metal, leaves, trunk, glass and gasoline, its roots in the air like drained veins; your toes are that cat with her litter climbing inside the bonnet for shelter from the storm; your ankle the beetle crawling near the tyre, your knees the weeping-laughing island of mad woman on the road who ties twigs to her arms as talismans; your belly the

flyover twitching with lights; your sex the crepuscular sky, your nape the train with its secret load of bombs; your nose this small droning plane that will bloom into a rose of flame against monsoon plumes; your hair the stratosphere; your mouth those satellites circling without any sense of beauty or fear.

Perhaps you still want to be eight years old, straining to hear your voice echo as you stand on a mountain beneath its peak of whipping snow. But the mountain hears nothing. Not the sun, not the avalanche, not the dynamite that was bored and stuffed into its body so that its inside explodes first. Then the grand slide into rubble.

But where has the painter disappeared? You don't want to think the director too is asleep with a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on his nose. Light burns as he stirs. He sleeps on many things including *samay*, quotidian time and *kaal*, deep time. You don't know the reach of everyday time. You don't know how distant distance can be. But you aren't prepared to give up; you want more, more, more, your arms are spiralling galaxies. In a shower of soot petals you wonder what lies behind more but more carnage. You can wonder about the pain of a shattered ankle, an ant with burnt feelers, at the slow starvation death of bleached coral, the earth's curvature caving in implosions, blowing as explosions; the world scotch-taped in blind pain. Perhaps cercity is a stipulation for living. You remembered the burning house. Did you think it was home?

What's your home but this slide, this way of looking into what lies beneath pain, paint, beneath base coat and burnish? What lies behind the endless rolls of white in your screen? What lies behind this bounty of white? Could it be love?

Is this the bromous glow you see adrift in the painting's edge or near the catwalk or perhaps in the corner of your dream? You cajole the dusty starlit fog with yantra, tantra, mantra; this is the one performance you repeat every day because

you know there's no date to ruination, no time before decay began.

There's no time before hope. You are adamant, adamantine. You are eight again, holding a budgerigar in a cage and you can't bear its imprisonment so you leave the cage door open and walk away. It takes a long time to hop to the door, waits, and then flies away leaving behind bird-stink. Now you are older and you want to fly away, you want to apply Indian art's reverse perspective to yourself and the world so that you step out of the painting, like so many figures do effortlessly in cave after cave in Ajanta. They step out to greet you. First they step on the uneven basalt floor, then on unseen lotuses submerged by rain, their cups brimming with drowned bees and swollen pollen. Petals overlap deep beneath their soles. You could walk out too. But you have forgotten how to walk on water.

And the sun can't decide whether to set or rise.

This is why the twilight is bruised mango.

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