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Surrey (For Joan And Tony)

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ty and Student Poetry



Surrey (for Joan and Tony)

The scones with clotted cream on Richmond Hill—
Magnolias, black tea, sweet talk, the Thames—
An old friend, bald as my son, shares the thrill
Of pat-a-cake. In time their hands are hymns.

"Wee bairns both," his wife laughs, a lowland honey
In her tongue. Her face is like the Muse's, grey
And young. In this extended family
The heart weaves a tapestry against the day

When bread and milk, wheat and cow, are earth.
In the laughter of my daughters, the river
Runs uphill. My wife speaks of another birth.
I remember the life floating in and from her.

Something in the sun or on the green
Whispers, "Where you travel is where you've been."

—Craig Williamson
August 2, 1993
Richmond, Surrey

I Was Wiser Not To Leave

Our canopies are thinning, open more
to the neighbor's chimney and sky
and trickles of leftover brimstone, cooling
above this Pompeii unburied. We cut back,
hoping for greater profit next season.

Business is not bad. You've read Voltaire?
That scene on the bones of the earthquake —
I hadn't thought of it shaking anyone's faith,
just smiled at its realism. My man too
was a little too ready to turn our daughters

over to a non-paying crowd. He valued books
and their sequestered stories, virtues imagined
for the edification of single scholars, not for
the delight of a wife in bed. Anyway, I am now
bedecked in rings beyond imagination,

enriched far beyond that nuclear family that fled,
faces only forward, the blinkers of warnings
and horned ideology of loud voices — ah,
I watched them going, my gaze never wavered

Sibelan Forrester

Featured Poets

FACULTY

Craig Williamson	English
Woon Ping Chin	English
Sibelan Forrester	Russian
Steven Hopkins	Religion

STUDENTS

Sam Taylor
Jacqueline Morais
Megan Hallam
Megan Cunningham

The poetry section was experimental
in nature for this newspaper and many
thanks go out to those who submitted
and gave support to the staff. The
Phoenix would like to solicit some
feedback on whether this section
should be continued in the future. Please
send comments to jfreema2 over email

In Telugu Country

In your village

*rich in tanks and broad rivers
hungry bees feast
on a red lily
flourishing in the middle
of the sugarcane:*

*Do not embrace my body
which has given birth of our son --
it would ruin your lovely chest!*

--from an old Tamil anthology

Safe from milk, from its lethal sweetness
on his chest, he sees his infant son
for the first time. Behind the curtain,
reflected in a brimming bowl of oil,
the strong boy, wriggling, black as a watersnake,
tugged by a swaying tide
of surface ripples,
is held up in her thin, lovely
arms. He can't see the immaculate kingfisher
blues, geruas and gold of her sari;
a wife's vermilion drawn along the part of her
hair, shining like the seed of a
split-open pomegranate. There is only the hushed lisp
of her bangles; the smell, in her hair,
of jasmine he'd crush
between his fingers,
forcing open
the wet blossoms.

He sees the red hag hanging from the well bucket
like the opulent tongue of the village goddess
emitting her strange blessing
beyond speech.

But in his chest there is an ache,
far worse than the white acid of her milk
on his bare skin -- even seeing it
would steal his manhood -- the mother's poison.
It is the ache of her absence --
two hollows dug out by the track of her firm lover's breasts
down his body, her hard black nipples,
in the long embrace
when they made
his son.

On the inner courtyard's hard sapphire,
the family arranges itself,
casually -- blowzy petals around the stamen's
dark eyes. One of the elder sisters
tends the wet banana leaves; another squats
in front of the new father,
holding between her legs
hammered silver pots
of rice and sambar. Grandma picks at a dung fire
in the kitchen shadows, combing
its wild orange hair
with a pine switch. Soon they will eat.
The child will be taken away.

Outside,
in the loud heat of midday, past the little boys
spinning their tops in the dirt,
at the very edge of the Andhra village,
in Telugu country, the crooked snouts
of red hills rise abrupt
out of the long green paddy.

Steve Hopkins

