

A Thoroughly Modern Birthday

Acidity wakes me on my birthday.
To me, it's a *deshi* ailment, frequently
discussed and doctored in Dhaka,
though before last night I can't say
I ever felt the burn.

I take it as a good sign my
unaccountably cleansed body
is reacting to its rare (these days)
indulgences: red wine and Thai food
after my nephew's party, full of the
odd tensions these mixings
often bear.

My phone shows both the time and weather
forecast. From bed, I pull the blind towards
me. The sky is blooming blue and the
window smeared with rain. Too early,
I think; too much cold; I will stay swaddled
here a while.

There are no messages to read: every app's
as dry and empty as an underground hollow.
I'm not active on Facebook and no-one
sends cards, except my parents.
I thank my mother for shooting me out
of her birth canal
although it wasn't until night,
about twenty-eight minutes to nine,
she tells me.

I take my dog out to walk through this
unseasonably stormy morning. He is itching
to get going—I figure cross because he
didn't get out for long last night, caught up
in that family gathering. Like me,
Pip Hummel prefers his own space and time
to do with as he likes
and if he doesn't get it,
releases great shuddering sighs.

It's not the beach he leads me to
today, but the walkway to the oval
I've trod one thousand times.
Through my earphones I listen
to hits of the nineties all the while.

Timeless, says my friend Johnny Freer,
a musician who appreciates what I
refer to as 'our era'.

Back at home I make coffee while
reading a book about kombucha.
Even after walking and breakfast,
Pip Hummel is scratching. I decide
what I'll work on today, my preference
for some fellowship application.

In the backyard a pigeon
stalks the base of the luxurious
Queenslander coop housing the galah
we inherited after nan died.
Yesterday I asked mum how old is
Percy Jolly and she said forty-nine,
whereas Pip Hummel is roughly thirteen.
We are a house full of geriatric animals.

Last night Suneil Gupta sent a message
asking about my birthday plans. Now I reply
with 'swimming' and 'dinner' today and
'the pub' for tomorrow.
He is online and messages back
to tell me he is smashed and carrying on
to the dream world:
'Good morning to u / Good night to me.'

I finish eating my kiwi fruit and
rinse my plate. I check my 'personal email'
thinking I will read the poem-a-day
curated by Dennis Caswell and sent
to the inboxes of interested people.
So far there's nothing from America,
so I read the most recent of the backlog,
a poem by Muriel Spark about, I guess,
James Joyce and Nora Barnacle
when they were very poor and happy
and working very hard.

Hearth

Vagator 403509
Stray flares
of another country
sent up
Not fuel enough
to propel departure

Benguet 2600
Earth is in the food
and beer in brown bottles
Everyone works hard
at their art here

Altinho 403521
The place where everyone knows your name
Forgets your name
Invents for you
another name

Indiranagar 560038
Books and plants
really do make the room
stand apart
from the raintree
sighing over
asking
who will be
the next
love
now*

White Gum Valley 6162
All the grotesquery
of a Tim Winton novel
flanked by
roller shutters

Adelaide Airport 5950
We've sucked this land dry
But wine
still features
heavily

*After *Lament #31* by Nathan Curnow