

Ladakh

half a day in the air
the world wildly different

sizzling skies
Martian Himalaya

behind the noise
the same silence

of home

Leh

silk route city
our wobbly legs
in your ancient streets

people step over
a sleeping dog
peaceful horned cow
browsing the shops

we're both a bit sick
but I feel jubilant

a wonderful freedom
knowing everyone
is me

wild dogs

wild dogs barking
sleepless belly rumbling
very late or very early?
three quarter moon
hangs over Ladakh
mind rolls like the night train
it's freight of worry
and loneliness
how I wish I knew

the way

night winds

night winds
rampaging through
this empty hotel
try not to run
down rattling corridors
monsters
kick the toilet door
roaring
their friends
ransack the building

sorcerer

the abbot at Lamayuru
really loved my magic tricks
they called it 'jadu'
a Hindi borrow word
it became my nickname
for a month or two

one day he asked me
to show them to an old yogin
who had been on retreat
a group of elite monks gathered
as I twiddled with a lighter
some elastic bands
and general foolishness
with sleight of hand
the old man stepped back
and lifted his hand towards me
and started chanting in Tibetan

somewhat confused
I did another trick
and the abbot made a comment

in Ladakhi
I didn't understand
but the old man suddenly stopped
and then everyone roared with
laughter
the monks doubled over
pulling each other around
their tears rolled down their
nut brown
creased faces
maroon robes
dotted dark

at last the abbot told me
"he thought you were a sorcerer
and was doing the 'quelling magic'
mantra
because you did another trick
I told him that your jadu
was stronger than his mantra"

later he asked me to teach him
"this magic makes people happy

come to my room after lights out
and show me"
so I said "I'll teach you my secrets
if you teach me yours!"
again the laughter
I don't think you are supposed
to talk to rinpoches
that way
but I went to his room
late at night
and showed him everything
at one point
we both rolled on our backs
our feet in the air
holding on to our stomachs

delighted

at the nonsense of it all

guesthouse

yet another guesthouse

left behind

it's ok

unwanted luggage

not carried

it's easy

betrayal

one day older

my heart

one day lighter

how could love?

how could love

ever be lost

when it's not a part of me

I'm a part of it

hall of mirrors

in the hall of mirrors
our looking-glass selves
reflect phantom feedback

night dogs barking
at barking dogs
in the night

overhead

overhead

the eagle wheeled

golden

the furnace desert

the rock in my hands

momentarily

weightless

complaining

when complaining stops

the world floods in

and I'm swept along

by the tweeting of birds

the murmuring street

the patter of rain

earthquake

Ontul Rinpoche's answer
had made me laugh
"what is your essential practice?"
"I eat, I sleep, hahaha!"
we had talked long
and parted as friends
outside his room
I chatted to his wife
but was distracted
a repetitive clanking
on the tin roof above
Lake Rewalsar
the Tibetans call it Tsopema
three stories
lots of monkeys about
but this was rhythmic
and just as I was
beginning to wonder
about drumming macaques
the Rinpoche ran past us
"EARTHQUAKE! EARTHQUAKE!"

and we fled after him
leaping down the stairs
we stood in a garden
trees swayed drunkenly
no wind was blowing
all the buildings
huffed out dust
grey brown gobbets
the ground heaved
sickly
the town let out a groaning
a strange lament
it didn't last long
the damage was minor
the epicentre
was the other side
of the Himalayas
the part that sticks most
in the memory
is counting my mala
om mani padme hum
standing with the holy man

and loving the camaraderie

of accepting

our imminent

demise

[what3words](#)

[wikipedia](#)

dog at Tsopema

we walked around
the holy lake
suddenly
a dying dog

its wounds horrific
the pain and pathos
of its last breathing

alone in the afternoon
I returned and gazed
then something inside
let go

what if I really stopped
asking the world
to make me happy?

long train

man but that train
just rolled on forever
clanking
lumbering
across the vastness
of India
“chai, chai, masala chai”
the cries of the hawkers
selling sweet tea
more like hot cola
no fizz
roasted pecans
in funnels of newspaper
I lost my bearings
and tried to recall
what life was like
before getting on
and heading East
one afternoon
a large family came
traditional Hindu

many generations
I played with the kids
did magic tricks
for everyone
we pointed out
interesting sights
through the bars
of the carriage
as we banged out
the interminable miles
and enjoyed
being pleasant
with each other
unencumbered
by conversation
only a few
shared words
the evening came
jolting
and lurching
towards the night
I hadn't bought a berth

and started making
a nest
on the floor
two of the older boys
bunked together
so they could offer me
a bed
a gesture
that still moves me
the surprise
of kindness
the planet turned
under our wheels
my eyes leaked
with gratitude
that a home
could be found
anywhere

Kushinagar

that massive bell rang
here where the Buddha died
polyphonic primal purity

rang
reverberating expansion
the frequency of magic

rang
evening's azure vibration
indigo resonance of awe

rang
under the mythrill moon
silver sickle celestial
exquisite

that Dharma wheel
still ringing
its ancient presence
pristine

the burning ghats

through the heat shimmer
of the pyres of Varanasi
a boat
a tiny shroud
stone weighted
sinks

the mother's hand
touches the Ganga waters
wet but empty

flames purify
those who cross over
flesh blackening
melting

the elements return
to Mother Nature
from whom
they never really left

Mahabodhi moonlight

power cut

just long enough

to hear the hush

and reply

singing Tara's mantra

to see the Mahabodhi moonlight

and respond

with shining eyes

to feel the benediction

and answer

just answer

kaleidoscope

yesterday's endless kaleidoscope

conjured life stories

revolving

mutating

tomorrow's hesitant mirages

magic narrative momentum

appearing

disappearing

today's unfolding bewilderment

karmic quandaries unreal

inspiring

expiring

Rajgir

thunderstruck

I sit on Vulture Peak

where the Compassionate One

was real

the darkness of pain

cleaved by lightning

inexpressible

the gratitude

to hear the echoes

still

[what3words](#)

dog and bell

a Gothic duet
for dog and bell
long before dawn

one holds a note
much better
than the other

cholera

over the doctor's shoulder
I hallucinated Green Tara
ethereal light all around
she winked at me
and I smiled
"yes, please yes, I'm ready"
but I wasn't
or she wasn't
and the doctor found a vein

later he said it was
his personal best
bringing someone back
from that far gone
I remember him telling
the little Indian boy
to run

fast

to get the list of medical things
he'd just given him

I had started feeling sick
just after breakfast
and quickly lost many litres
of body fluids
from both ends
I was staying in a monastery
in Bodh Gaya
and in my cell
rupturing my life
into a bucket

I was trying to raise the alarm
but then kept passing out
this cycle
went around and around
for two or three hours
before someone heard me

an English doctor
months later
said it was most likely
cholera
Christ on a bike! cholera!

well

another close call I guess

from that I know

that I'm not afraid to die

it's to be alone forever

in that infinite void

that's what grips me

the utter cold panic

frozen isolation

a desolation so complete

the Queen of the Dead herself

would turn away

in fright

for Bankei

my birth pangs
my death throes
ambiguous collisions
spiral notebooks
of melodies filled
with uncertain histories

there

in your inner sanctum
in mutual appreciation
my voice

finally heard

never

pain body condensed
made of fear
helpless in the endless night

love body immaculate
made of light
embracing the tragic me

Dharmakaya whispering
I will never
leave you

thistledown

homeless thistledown

drifting through

the come and go

of everywhere

the rise and fall

of everything

the hello and goodbye

of everyone

Kathmandu

rainy night in Kathmandu

ghostly cycle rickshaw

looms and swishes

ratling past

the whole street

suddenly goes dark

all but this shop

shining

Boudhanath stupa

Boudhanath stupa

long imagined

now really here

surprised sorrowing

nameless immense

I circumambulate

the universal tragedy

and wonder

what those eyes see

Chomolungma

up through clouds

sunshine flying

we all gasp

Mother Goddess of the Snows

herself

in person

Makalu

Lhotse

Gauri Shankar

ok

eyes wet

but this time

it's joy

night dive

night dive

scary jump nervous

black waters threaten

serious scuba

going down

floating depths haunted

bio-luminescence

flitting fins thrill

the ghost waters

our torches raised

shining through bubbles

the skittering surface

comes closer

in just one breath

boundaries breached

a bewilderment of stars

ascending infinity

cosmic expanse

of wonderment

looping above

looming below

blue

blue angel blue ocean blue

I cried out to you

suspended in reachless quiet

blue freedom slow motion flew

embracing us soft

in blue grace

[song on mantrasphere](#)

no poetry

today I have no poetry
of my own
just the sunlight
on my feet
as I cradle
my aching bones
my head swimming
in pools of longing
the Goddess gently warms
my toes
and reminds me that it is
from the ground up
that yesterday
is released

ladyboy

Bangkok ladyboy
following us
leaving the park
early in the morning
before it got too hot
lots of jugglers
come to practice
but a sprinkler system
would douse everyone
when its clock
told it to
and so we left
and I found myself
talking with the man
who was a woman
all in black
thirty something
trying way too hard
but I felt moved
by her woundedness
a tear in the stockings

she explained her night
in the cells
with no breakfast
the police kicked her out
having deprived her
a night's earnings
a night's solicitations
and so I invited her
for grub
whatever you like
I felt magnanimous
and listened
as she talked and talked
and ate and ate
a thick black hair
protruded from the makeup
on her chin
when we left
she kept after me
and wanted me to take
a photo
but she demanded

a glamorous background
not far not far
I smelled a rat
and sure enough
it was a ruse
to try and make me
her client
what made me saddest
was her assumption
that feeding her
was about my need
and not hers
I got away
wandering
wondering
about the many ways
one can prostitute
oneself

time stops

this is where

time stops

high note

jungle insects

high voltage

tension floating

not waiting

for a future

that never

arrives

sleepers

of dreams

clickety clock

night freighted

rolling stock

sleepy weighted

nodding

lolling

to Bangkok

clockety clack

lost towns

losing track

slumber bye

wheel squeal

steel spin whistle

coming back

clackety click

carriage groans

eyelids thick

loco motives

shadow schemes

human cargo