

Possession

Still-blue eyes and milk-tooth smile,
Five-year-old wonder turned, full force
On the close, smiling face of the crouching man
From behind the paint-peeled stall.

Tiny, stubby hairs on his chin move
As he speaks, "A present for the young lady,"
And hands me a balloon,
Bright and perfectly curved against the summer
sky.

Bobbing and leaping in the prickly air,
A shining red dancer on a string
Whose tether I hold fast
Wound between small, candyfloss-sticky fingers.

She has magic in her, that balloon,
I tell my father sagely.
Tugging the big brown hand folded around mine
I guide him between the stalls.

Look how she holds her head up,
A proud Indian princess,
Age-old and beautiful.
All brand-new and mine alone.
Mine.

His hand is gone.
I spin around, suddenly at sea
In a crowd larger, louder, brighter than before.
A tall circus, blocking out the sky.

And then I see him.
A spectacled face peers among the bustling
bodies.
Desperate for a sight of me,
He imagines I might float away.

He runs, and scoops me up;
Holds me to him.
My hands, clammy about his rough neck,
Seem wrong, and different from before.

My balloon, my beautiful dancer,
She's gone! I try to tell him,
Struggling against his suffocating arms
Until he looks at me, and sees.

We look up, scanning the sky,
Myself desperate, him in sympathy,
Witnesses to the perfect red ellipse that glides
away.
Up. Up. Up.

I imagine I am her,
Travelling far away.
Away from everything that held my string,
Into the blue, and through it, to whatever lies
beyond.

I cry.
My father holds me tightly.
Perhaps he is frightened too.

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