

**SORAYA PEERBAYE**

**Poems for the Advisory Committee  
on Antarctic Names**



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South coast, Mauritius



## South coast, Mauritius

arc of water rising from the car wheels, translucent ribs  
lifting as we plough through rivulets left by storm;  
in the streets, young men, brown ankles bangled by sunlight  
and rainwater. At Gris-Gris, where we walk the basalt shore,  
a girl in a green salwar kameez, turned verdant kite  
as she runs in salt-arrowed wind; above, seabirds, swept  
as Arabic calligraphy. Graffiti by the crumbling stone kiosk  
exposing its skeleton of rust at Pointe-aux-Roches

*Ramesh love Primila*

while my small brother, clambering  
over tide pools, holds up a starfish, his whole body  
starfish as he loses, catches his balance, dances unsteady  
on one foot. But mostly, these  
velocity-painted images, as we drive along the coast, me  
cyclopean with my eye to the viewfinder: filao trees, fragile  
sentinels, overexposed by coral light pouring through late  
afternoon, their rows and rows interrupting the slow sun like  
frames of film caught in eager machinery, my finger never fast  
enough to release the shutter, as I try to photograph  
the light, the light photographs me

Curios: Poems for K.



## Zistoire

I've learned that the story comes from the invitation to come in. The embrace, his cheek against mine, the stubbled feel of a sun-hollowed sea urchin. He leaves his shoes at the door, hangs his coat on the banister; I put on the kettle. The story comes from the invitation to stay.

His hands, bronze, dark green filigree of veins. His voice, warm, the timbre of wood.

We talk of family, his patients, horse-racing, poetry, cooking, dreaming or not dreaming. Small words nod their heads, my *huh*, *hmm*, Créole utterances that have found their way into our mouths from French and Arabic, Urdu and Hindi, Malagasy.

*Ayo, taé, y'Allah . . .*

Sometimes, most often when we talk of music, or matters musical — a concert he attended, how he learned to play the harmonica, Dr. Oliver Sacks' lecture on music and the brain — his voice seizes. I've learned to make my attention gentle, then, to listen without hurry, to pretend not to notice his glistening eye.

## Pistasse

between us, on the kitchen table:  
two cups of tea, pistachios.

in the bowl, their abundance,  
their crackling anecdotes: our

hands, absent-minded, kindling  
this light green warmth.

how we recognize each other  
in gesture: his shrug, bargaining

at the bazaar with mamzelle  
pomme d'amour, missié pistasse;

or hunchbacked theft from the bulk  
bins, marked NO SAMPLING

(not theft, he protests, but critique  
of an economic system — in a nutshell).

treble *crack!* of tooth, husk, kernel,  
shucks red-stuccoed tidbit,

coaxes it out; brown-feathered  
rooster, jiggles it

into gullet; guzzles his tea (sibilant  
stream, glottal gulps).

*mm*, he says, charmed  
as sweetness washes lemony salt;

dusts his palms with a small flourish,  
smiles: extravagant teeth.

## Disque

A boy with whole-bodied intent,  
    he'd snatched the 78 rpm  
from the Morning Glory gramophone,

    shattered it: shining blue-black shards  
at his feet. This object, known first  
    by its breaking.

A grown man, his fingers amble  
    the dust jackets, the fine print  
of their spines. A physical musing.

    Not the fumble for cassettes,  
the noisy sputter and catch  
    of sprockets in the deck's

mechanism. But this — the record  
    held, by its edge, at an angle,  
shirt sleeve salving the bruise of fingerprints. *Écoute,*

    he says. We sit in the living room, as the needle  
passes through its brief darkness, a cyclical,  
    crackly creek. We tilt our heads back.

His favourites restored, iridescent on compact discs,  
    but he rarely plays them, can't bear  
their breathless perfection,

misses the scratch, skip and stutter,  
that sent us into laughing fits.

Or perhaps

it's the gesture itself,  
the needle carried to the record's surface,  
a pond where the water ripples

inwards.

## Caméra

Thick, square fingers bunched at the small  
mechanisms: deft, full of mind,  
fidgeting,

electronic trill and chitter responding  
to gestures learned with Brownie,  
bellows camera, Canonet, classic  
single-lens reflex —

his boy's life in black and white,

my mother in Kodachrome — peacock-  
blue saris, mustard-yellow  
lenghas, psychedelic A-line skirts —

symmetry of landscapes —  
clusters of guavas or Bing cherries,  
fields of cane flower, fields of snow,

red canopy of flamboyants on the island,  
October leaves in northern Ontario —

He stands huddled against the viewfinder,  
holds his breath  
so the photograph will not blur,



## Armonica

the span of a tamarind pod full  
of pulpy, puckering sound

untaught he holds it backwards  
so that this too he reads from right  
to left learns *God Save the Queen* then *Au clair de la lune*  
theory slipping through the holes save for the do, re, mi  
of the Rodgers & Hammerstein mnemonic (which he sings  
in translation *mi — la mie d'un bon pain chaud!*)

in a Dublin concert hall hears Larry Adler  
melody an addled firefly in cupped hands  
the virtuoso tosses Little Ladies four-hole harmonicas  
no bigger than two squares of chocolate into the crowd

he catches one  
grins a silver smile

chuffed (you could say) and still, bashful his amateur's repertoire  
jazz American musicals *Alouette*  
stinger of classical *à la* Warner Brothers  
and séga the first music he plays for an audience  
thirteen years old the year of his grandmother's death  
his mother and aunts gathered round