

On the Verge Writing Contest 2019, First-Place Poetry Winner

By Amogha Lakshmi Halepuram Sridhar

Finding Home

I

“What is homeland? To hold on to your memory – that is homeland.”

— Mahmoud Darwish, *The Homeland: Between Memory and History*

Somewhere someone thinks of mother

and airstrikes, in the same thought,

someone who tastes at once

the bittersweet of blood and dates.

Now think of that someone

being thousands of someones.

Imagine if you were given bricks and asked

to build a home from memory.

II.

“All of us in search of home. I have heard it said we are the uninvited. We are the unwelcome.”

— Khaled Hosseini, *Sea Prayer*

We pack our bags, choosing only what we need most –

hopes, dreams, hard work, bilingual skills.

We leave behind everything else in search of home.

As of today, the US government shutdown

over a wall to keep immigrants out

has lasted 27 days. Every passing day

the halls of the White House echo,

“Go back where you came from!”

In the future, I will build it brick by brick;

I will make a home of my resistance.

III.

“Halunda tavareege enendu hadale / holedandeliruva karakiyahanga habbale avara rasaballi”

(What shall I sing for the home I drunk milk from / may their lineage pervade like the grass on the riverbank)

— *Kannada folk poem*

My last Google search was “child+abuse+statistics+india”

and none of the results came up with a number.

There is no number reflecting my experience, I think,
of wanting to go home while you’re in bed at home.

There is no number for the deep homelessness you feel in your heart
when your parents won’t accept you
but want you to marry a man and have children
like they did before you.

In the future, you will have run to your home
as much as you will have run away from it.

IV.

“and if the City falls but a single man escapes / he will carry the City within himself on the roads of exile”

— Zbigniew Herbert, *Report From The Besieged City*

There is an unfinished poem somewhere in my drafts
titled “Is It Still Home If You’re Ruled By A Far Right Government?”

But this poem shall not go unfinished.

It is for the homeless, the displaced, the refugee, the immigrant.

It is for the future; it is for finding hope, it is for finding home.

I hope that those who have carried whole cities with them
find somewhere to put it down.

V.

“you will greet yourself arriving / at your own door, in your own mirror”

— Derek Walcott, *Love After Love*

I am terrified that when I turn up on my doorstep,
I will not offer me water like one should to guests.
I am afraid I will greet me with questions too plenty, too cruel.
Have you, O have you broken your compass and cried the stars away?
Have you suffocated under a chemical fog? Have you floated ashore
as a corpse in a bright orange life jacket? Have you cried in a storm
for estranged daughters? Have you died enough?
I am afraid I will turn myself away from home.
In the future, I am afraid I will no longer find home
within myself.