

Nasik

That old town
with its network of temples
the main water tank
wide enough for the different
sects to share
and the boys that trawled
the pool-floor for coins

Each spot you brushed
with your story—
or left some hook of the real—
a tiny industry bloomed
I touched them all
on hands and knees
and in touching woke my name too
in the ancient fading
population visitor logs

Sita and Raavan Rajguru

Nasik

What is it pins
the meeting of their eyes?

There at that innocuous traffic intersection
(*"imagine this was all jungle"*)

where the Lakshman Rekha crossed:
Ravana with nine heads missing

"Raavan Rajguru" to be precise:
elegant and humble Brahmin with a parasol

the skin a bright red-orange
the moustache curled and well tended

and the most
striking thing

his casual expression as
he stands in the cage

of his shrine—*"not a shrine*
but a memorial" our guide insists—

just a few feet forever exiled
from Sita

and Sita half-hidden
in the late afternoon shade

still holding in her arms
the meal she had served

to the stranger but now
under heavier bolt

in the cage of her own shrine
—“*not a shrine*” our guide
insists “*a memorial*” —

just a few insurmountable
feet from him

What is it pins
the meeting of their eyes?

Not Sita, but a Phantom

On Indrajit's arm Sita: but doppelgänger zombie
limbs collid and smeared with crud Empty eyes

Disheveled: a single braid across her bone-thin face
a single soiled rag to wear Raghava's darling

Inspecting the spectre
Hanuman's own face

twisted by tears
Concluded it was

indeed Sita:
he'd seen her

just recently

that jewel
of Janaka

And watching this other
joyless one

standing in
the chariot

her hair in
the rakshasa

heir's fingers our
MahaSimian

thoughtcalled
his troops

to the sight
Indrajit pulled the Sita clone

toward him
unsheated his sword and leaning it

slapped that apparition
with his free hand

on her stand in the chariot
slapped and slapped the figure

even as the Simians
watched with shrieks of Ram Ram

watched through tears of pain
Believe me I'd

*never hesitate to kill
a woman: not for*

*a second Not if
it could cause*

pain to the enemy
So said Rama's enemy

that son of Ravana
Right now watch me

*I'll kill her myself
I'll cut her up*

*then I'll kill Rama
Lakshmana Sugriva*

*and I'll kill
you Hanuman*

Even in her state
the woman

of the lovely thigh
of rapturous shape

glistened in the blue hour
hope's sweet foundry—

Indrajit drew the blade
diagonally across her

from clavicle to hip
and the pieces fell

to the ground
The deed done he said *Ha!*

Witness my wrath!
Rama's woman is slain

Not far away the Simians heard him
with open hanging mouths palms down

for this calamity that had fallen sure
as the evening sun had allowed it

Sita's face: moon-white mime
with even holes for eyes

split apart and
scattered to the winds

Sita angel of death
in your dusk-blue cloth

and the body before
the moment's knife

already lifeless heavy

Sita field of marigolds
Chalkface clown

head holy shroud The sunken
spots were the ones

that watched you