

FLASH FICTION

un _ broken

by Mandira Pattnaik



"A Crowd of One" by Alexiane Montpetit

it is possible you broke ___ bamboo pencil into two on purpose, agitated with ___ teasing — *pinkie, pinkie* — your sister was putting up with, mutely, helplessly, class bully laughing, at her oily braids, pale pink skin, squint eyes like mongols; it is possible you broke ___ standing record for okras washed in kitchen sink so ___ precision of near-automation negated ___ daily shout-fests between your parents; broke porcelain doll in guest bedroom to alert your family of a visiting uncle’s misdemeanour while he kept whispering — *it’s okay, i didn’t do it! i’m so sorry, i’m going away*; and it’s possible you’ve broken many things, felt ridiculously small, compressed, pressurized, but not felt, in least, guilty, as it happened today — ma still doing ___ laundry, folding it perfectly, arranging glass jars waiting for replenishments from where-you-came — turmeric and tamarind and dried fish — humming a *pahari* tune, sister and you taking ___ alsatian for a walk and back, fed and washed so dad could boast to his friends, like imitation *sahib* he knows he’ll never be: how he’d always wanted to own a big dog like *that*, and, how he’d repeat, n-th time, lest anyone forgets, *don’t mind my two daughters, we never wanted a son*, which, by now you’ve known, by ___ tone of it, and how your grandparents discuss ___ topic, is utterly untrue, but it unfurled afterward, when having dusted sofa, set flowers on brass vases, lawn to proxy bangalorean silk, and dishes, like *nawabi nizams*, you had oiled and braided, girls your age must look obedient and mannered, and set table with sweets and appetizers before those friends of dad descended to “party,” like most sundays, as though your home in this new delhi suburb was a colonial clubhouse, except for bollywood crooner without music, except it’d be ___ same, only chatter and laughs meant to outdo others, sun just done, fun just begun, and you imagined your schoolfriends in their beds flipping a book, or playing a video game, while you sisters carried plates of freshly fried *macher-boras* from kitchen, you womanly-girls, well brought-up daughters of respected family-line, except your thought was on ___ chemistry lesson you badly needed to work on, perhaps all night, when ma called you again to send along a tray with *opala* cups and a large pot of ginger tea, outside ___ skyline continued melting away, swirling into blackness, and you heard ma coughing, above ___ sound of flaming oil being swirled by ladle, found your sister texting grievances to one would-be friend (as if you girls from *garo* hills will ever have friends here), alsatian demanding dinner, when you happened to overhear one of those friends saying something in appreciation, and dad laughing loudest; that was when you barged into ___ party, slicing through an excited conversation on ___ sudden topic of marriage and marriageable girls, and, *your eldest is beautiful*, quickly followed by *i know a suitable boy. he’s a doctor in boston*, and you felt like a tuning fork in physics lab, or a matchstick struck carelessly; so picking up from where it was left, and in no uncertain terms, though dad protested, you’d been fearless like a lube on hinge — slippery, adamant; oily ladle still in hand ma had rushed

in, but you were decompressed gas, *not* feeling sorry for something all broken between you, within you, voice nearly broken too, crackle of words still resonating, because, ahead of you, beckoned an unbroken path.

end