

This is a poem, this is also from my newest collection, it's called "Lenox Hill". This is where my mother came to the states to have a cancer operation and she had it in Lenox Hospital in New York. Anyway she died in April and this is the first poem I was able to write for her, so I'm going to end with this. (mic fix). Now the background to this poem is the hospital after her operation, hearing the sirens constantly of Manhattan, my mother said to me "You know, these sirens sound like the elephants of Mihiragula". I didn't know who Mihiragula was, so I asked my father, I asked my mother, and they told me that there were various hun invasions, in various parts of the world, and one waves had come to Kashmir in probably 6th or 7th century AD. And this particular guy, Mihiragula, is known to document contemporary resources as a very cruel man and what he had done was, one day we was going through the Pir Panjal range in Kashmir, and one of his elephants had slipped. And it slipped and of course fell, and died, and Mihiragula liked the sound that that elephant produced so much that he had a herd pushed off so he could hear that cry again and again. So it's really quite awful, and my mother telling me that somehow that framed everything for me. So the poem is simply called "Lenox Hill", and the epigraph is simply

In Lenox Hill Hospital, after surgery,
my mother said the sirens sounded like the
elephants of Mihiragula when his men drove
them off cliffs in the Pir Panjal Range.

The Hun so loved the cry, one falling elephant's,
he wished to hear it again. At dawn, my mother
heard, in her hospital-dream of elephants,
sirens wail through Manhattan like elephants
forced off Pir Panjal's rock cliffs in Kashmir:
the soldiers, so ruled, had rushed the elephant,
The greatest of all footprints is the elephant's,
said the Buddha. But not lifted from the universe,
those prints vanished forever into the universe,
though nomads still break news of those elephants
as if it were just yesterday the air spread the dye
("War's annals will fade into night / Ere their story die"),

the punishing khaki whereby the world sees us die
out, mourning you, O massacred elephants!
Months later, in Amherst, she dreamt: She was, with dia-
monds, being stoned to death. I prayed: If she must die,
let it only be some dream. But there were times, Mother,
while you slept, that I prayed, "Saints, let her die."
Not, I swear by you, that I wished you to die
but to save you as you were, young, in song in Kashmir,
and I, one festival, crowned Krishna by you, Kashmir

listening to my flute. You never let gods die.
Thus I swear, here and now, not to forgive the universe
that would let me get used to a universe
without you. She, she alone, was the universe
as she earned, like a galaxy, her right not to die,
defying the Merciful of the Universe,
Master of Disease, "in the circle of her traverse"
of drug-bound time. And where was the god of elephants,
plump with Fate, when tusk to tusk, the universe,
dyed green, became ivory? Then let the universe,
like Paradise, be considered a tomb. Mother,
they asked me, So how's the writing? I answered My mother
is my poem. What did they expect? For no verse
sufficed except the promise, fading, of Kashmir
and the cries that reached you from the cliffs of Kashmir

(across fifteen centuries) in the hospital. Kashmir,
she's dying! How her breathing drowns out the universe
as she sleeps in Amherst. Windows open on Kashmir:
There, the fragile wood-shrines—so far away—of Kashmir!
O Destroyer, let her return there, if just to die.
Save the right she gave its earth to cover her, Kashmir
has no rights. When the windows close on Kashmir,
I see the blizzard-fall of ghost-elephants.
I hold back—she couldn't bear it—one elephant's
story: his return (in a country far from Kashmir)
to the jungle where each year, on the day his mother
died, he touches with his trunk the bones of his mother.

"As you sit here by me, you're just like my mother,"
she tells me. I imagine her: a bride in Kashmir,
she's watching, at the Regal, her first film with Father.
If only I could gather you in my arms, Mother,
I'd save you—now my daughter—from God. The universe
opens its ledger. I write: How helpless was God's mother!
Each page is turned to enter grief's accounts. Mother,

I see a hand. Tell me it's not God's. Let it die.

I see it. It's filling with diamonds. Please let it die.

Are you somewhere alive, somewhere alive, Mother?

Do you hear what I once held back: in one elephant's
cry, by his mother's bones, the cries of those elephants

that stunned the abyss? Ivory blots out the elephants.

I enter this: The Beloved leaves one behind to die.

For compared to my grief for you, what are those of Kashmir,
and what (I close the ledger) are the griefs of the universe
when I remember you—beyond all accounting—O my mother?