

Reminders of Home

By Tulsi Patel

A-or-tic dis-sec-tion, the doc enunciates
sounding out violence with his syllables
a tear, rip, shred of the intima that is
“incompatible with life.”

And yet
There you, patient, are
blood still raging through
like sap coursing through trees.

My dad spent his childhood
at a lumber mill,
c. 1970s
Raipur, India.

Sagwan trees,
ripped, denuded of their rugged outer bark,
softer insides vulnerably exposed
before crisply, mercilessly sliced,
a dis-sec-tion of its own.

Weakening aortic roots are not unlike
destabilizing tree roots,
the insulting smells
of surgical cautery and blood singed alike
mill’s sawdust and sweat.

I’d rather think of
what there was before, in the forest—
 The connections,
 like the interstitium,
 the elaborate mycorrhizal networks spreading nutrients to
 smaller, sicker trees,
 like aorta to capillaries, oxygen and necessities
 pooled and shared.
Oh, how the greens are giving!
 with the things that allow them to
 stay grounded.

I'm reminded of home, where the people, too, are giving,
 where children play cricket with sticks
 and fight for warm rotis drenched in ghee,
 lotuses in muddied waters grow,
 roots as deep as I am tall, obscured.

But
you
bled
out, and my
dad's family lumber mill went
bankrupt.

How is that, then, that the mind,
furiously inventive, transforms
the dangerous and grotesque,
the tragedies and destructive mechanisms
of both bodies and trees
into comforts and
reminders of home?

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