

As the River Flows

I was not born into this world.
I was called forward,
by a roar the mountains made
before they knew my name.
Snow collapsing into itself for centuries,
a thin seam opening in stone,
water insisting
where silence had hardened.
Something that was older than devotion
bent toward me first:
First, hands cradled me,
then cities,
then the slow lean of faith pressed against my skin,
until I forgot
what stillness felt like.

I learned their language.
Bone-grit settling into my bed,
the slow unmaking of what was promised forever.
Marigolds collapsing inward,
their orange bruising toward brown,
petals loosening, drifting apart.
The lamp set was floating not for me—
but for what they needed me to hold.
I held it.
I held, too, what came after,
slick sheen spreading without colour,
a metallic taste threading through my current,
a sediment thickening into a second weight
that did not move when I moved.
Fish turned without finishing their turns,
eyes stared into nothingness.

I did not refuse any of it.
Rivers are not taught refusal.
No one ever asked the current
whether it consented to become
a vessel, a mirror, a drain.
Sacred when convenient,
disposable when not.
Sacredness, I learned,
is what the believer keeps.
The river only keeps
what sinks.

Now something in me has stilled
that the surface does not show—
not death, not peace,

a catatonia moving downstream,
the body's old habit
of continuing.
They still come.
They still call me by the names
that sing of eternal reverence,
while along my edges
foam gathers into a pale insistence,
clinging where movement fails.
If I could refuse,
and I am trying, slowly,
in the only way water knows how:
By receding:
by leaving the shape of myself
in the dry cracked earth.
I would not ask to be worshipped.
I would ask
to pass
without remainder.

—Tannistha Kundu, XII-A