

SWEET HEART

TAMMY HO

Place my heart on a large plate

Encircle the red thing with sugar

Number the black holes on it

Insert with honey mixed water

So my heart is not at all bitter

A WOMAN TRAVELER IN KATHMANDU

SHIRLEY GEOK-LIN LIM

Coming down from Manakamana,
the wish-fulfilling goddess,
our bus smells of goat. The young kid
is silent, tired after its trek
in the cable car, across the flank
of the Himalayas, to her ancient
courtyards; slipping on blood past
headless goats, twitching and dead.
Pilgrims fed solemn children
coconut shreds, peanuts, tangerines peeled
with bloody fingers. I hope sacrifice
is a figure of speech, the dazed
creature ferried home to pet.

Until we stop to reconnoiter,
scrambling down a riparian bank
to the sandy beach by Trisuli
flowing clear and deep toward India.
The headmaster's knife must have slit
its throat. I do not look, but see it
struggle while the men circle, bowls in hand,
to catch its bright red blood to set
in a pudding.

As in my childhood
and in my dreams, nothing is wasted,
its heart and liver wrapped in leaves
to fry with onions, silvery glistening
innards uncoiled, washed in the stream
that comes rushing down bearing

a dead rat and where the children shit.

This is how the middle class feasts
in Nepal when the goddess protects
from harm and the evil eye:
boiling a cauldron full of whitest
rice, an iron pot of curried goat stew,
a kettle of churning chai. Men eat
and walk about; women in festive red
ladle, eat last and more, and wash
our metal dishes meticulously
as if they are in their own kitchens.
Children from shacks above come down
to watch us eat. Bare feet, bare bottoms,
they cartwheel, chase, and laugh. Limbs brim
with joy while we squat and chew,
old toads blinking at dragonflies
we know may be dead tomorrow.
I give my plastic bags to three
to fill with goat and rice. Others
crowd, silent, to swallow fistfuls
of slop heaped on covers. Quick, quick,
hands ball rice into mouths, until
no more can enter. Then, where the stream emerges,
comes the small man in his khaki costume,
head covered with a hat as if to say
he's somebody, to fill his pot with crusty
bottom, a hard dark layer I'd
gladly eaten when I had wanted
rice and rice and more rice to fill me.
That was a life away and past.

No longer Asian, not man or woman