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Buried in the dust

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BURIED IN THE DUST

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Creative Writing
in the Department of English
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

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Abstract

In July 2012, I left America for the first time to travel to Madurai, India, for a month-long journalism internship. The inspiration for the poetry in this work is deeply rooted in my experiences while in India, mentally, physically, and spiritually. Not knowing why I chose India to travel to for my first time abroad, I realized much later that I needed to be there in order to transition into the next stage of my life. I always wanted to experience what life was like without the amenities the Western world is accustomed to (hot showers, washers and dryers, reliable electricity, etc.). Through isolating myself from the familiar I woke up to a simpler, happier perspective on life. This isolation also stirred mixed emotions in me that I wasn't aware of until I began writing about the experience in these poems. The feeling of being watched by everyone was common and sometimes frightening or disturbing. This vulnerability was uncomfortable even though the experiences and realizations I had outweighed the negativity while I was in India.

The intent of this thesis is to explore how I've grown and what I took from the trip while comparing my Indian experience to life before and after my visit. With unconventional structural elements, I set out to put life and movement on the page to represent the chaotic, beautiful India and the emotions that carried the weight of each poem. Just from one month of being surrounded by strangers who stared with stone eyes, a language I didn't understand and memories of a life I didn't miss as much as I thought I would, this thesis follows the imaginative perceptions of a sleeping person through her evolution into a waking life.

Dedication

For Fiona, the woman who could survive the wilderness with nothing.

For Terry Thaxton for teaching me the strength of words.

For Michael, you have blessed me with so much happiness and inspiration.

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Public Decency

We are seven white [girls] walking down
a dirt road with fire pressing against our feet.
Don't notice him at first, hand
down his pants, tongue rolling out

like red carpet. He is burgundy
[human] machine
pulling life from his zipper.
He takes pictures of us with his eyes.

It reminds me of the guys pissing
outside downtown bars,
calling at stilettos and flat asses,
how drunks will do anything,

how it's normal to turn a corner here
and see a man masturbating
near a park bench, leaning
against old wish fences thinking this [life] is finished.

We huddle together, pretend to be warriors
as we get closer. Leave our eyes
plastered to dusty feet,
our anger locked in voice [boxes].

Mechanics

Breathe in jasmine flower braid,
busted feet, tar-coated eyes.
Meet one thousand empty faces,
keep pacing side streets
for Ganesh to hold you in his balanced arms,
for bus stop osmosis, velvet skies
feeding sun beams to your pores.
Stay comatose when men get too close to your neck
Stop breathing.
Count the flies on pomegranates and rotten mangos.
Their wings can't stop grabbing air
in rickshaw wind.
Listen to the strange tongues
lashing out hate crimes and love stories.
Three locals wearing knock-off Gucci shirts
tell you Varkala in December
is where the party hides,
in plastic baggies and burnt trash.
Say thanks
but don't turn your back to darkness.
Lurk through the slums, trying to find a new home,
a candle made from escape
and sun burns.
Temples melt around you.
Learn how to become ghost legs,
let them walk you to moonshine philosophy,
going back to the basics,
teach you how to survive real life mechanics.

Taking Flight

When I couldn't function without venom rubbing my muscles
I forgot that spring smells like robbery and pollen.

The TV broke from the tear drop she threw
and my words became atom bombs exploding by your feet.

When the new guy became an old mattress
the Great Seal turned into fangs numbing my fingertips,
the computer screen burnt through the living room
and the orange bottle ran out too quickly.

My hands stopped caring about whose skin I was caressing.

I flew through rubbing alcohol clouds
wearing nothing but your bleached sweatpants
with a dead phone and a pair of pliers in hand,
looking for a fight I couldn't win.

my body ached for days from
how I landed
and small hands reached out with dried papaya,
sang to me of sleeping on cave stomachs,
waking up to the rooster's message each morning,
wearing the same clothes as yesterday just with more dirt on them.

The children cried at the sun's rising from the sunken corner,
my body defrosted into the sand.

I walked through the ring of assault rifles and yellow sockets
as oxygen turned to mud.

India shouted my name in sign language
and I flew through cotton dreamscapes,
off the edge of the bed we shared in elevated voices,
to this place of sand and stone and children
singing into the Holi night.

Bharatanatyam for Beginners

her fingertips tap calf muscle
wrapped in the skin of devadasis
ankle bones resting against
the gods as she pounces the ground

head catching fire as the mridangam
takes over her body
sending sparks from eyes that have carved stone

the ghungroos chase her across stage
the veena harmonizes satin footsteps and wood
into a dance of bones sweeping the sky
spine held together by divine hand prints

asking if beauty is in delicate silks
twirling like wired wrists
or in gold threaded lights bursting from bent back
and red-tipped fingers

she calls attention
to the energy rotating around the Carnatic pulse
everyone feels their eyes open
begin translating her feet into celestial voices
telling us this moment is what beauty means
this is what we are

Sleepyhead

Urine tramps the aisles of the train,
past the family of eight sitting on a single bed
sharing chapatis and rice.

The smell keeps my eyes awake and hungry.
I need a pillow, use a backpack instead.

Scarf replaces blanket. Stares replace sleep.

A stick figure listens to N'Sync on his phone,
his brown eyes attached to the three of us.
We sing along in whispers.

Our voices become interruptions, photos
on adult sites—We don't know the difference
between fame and isolation.

Every time the train stops
I hear his phone
playing another childhood memory
His eyes never blinking.
Mine never closing.

The moon hums to us as the tracks disappear,
as I float down
the passages of everyone's dream canals.
I know it's three hours to Varkala where three
girls can wear bathing suits and smoke
cigarettes without turning into horror stories
for parents to tell their kids
but the urine keeps tapping my nostrils.
His eyes sound alarms in my head.

Dead on Arrival

In control.
My bones swing with capital weight,
creaking and waving at strangers.
The dust fades into cyanide exposure.
I inhale gun powder and rifles being held by chains.
Face first into India's sticky palms.
No invitation. No evacuation plan.
There are families spread across the floor
like famine.
My stomach can't handle the density.
In control.
Holding onto my bags tight enough
to feel the pulse.
The time never moves.
I ask a statue where the next flight to Madurai is
and he laughs like he's never seen
someone who looks so dead.
Language stacks bricks around me
until I'm nothing but formaldehyde.
Barely seeing through the cracks.
But I'm still in control.

Making It Rain

Money burns.

You used to say that in the way you threw presidents at your father for more sedation. In the way we'd ignite arguments over dollar menu items.

Before I told you I was leaving for a month,

before I said I couldn't understand your words any more then ran around all bare foot and sweaty, trying to make sense of anything.

When I left I sent goodbye through molecules. Did you get them?

Just so you know, I sat in cardboard houses and smoked cigarettes with the moon most nights.

She asked me how I got on that rooftop overlooking the grit city but I couldn't remember.

Told her the last thing I saw was the elephant before he swallowed me.

Talons burning into his palms.

There were people living on twenty rupees a day and I still needed more to throw at the cage like I was on display.

Or for more food to throw at the dogs after I finished eating.

Or for more clothes, more jewelry, more--

Or did I need it to have one weekend without bisphenol stuck to my fingertips, toasting to shared freedom with two comfortable strangers on the edge of the universe; for hours we sat on the deck of the same villa with the sandpaper hammock and purple flowers hanging off the wooden steps. It felt like we'd be watching the coast of the Arabian Sea flirt with the sand, showing off our third degree burns and photos of ex-boyfriends, licking each other's wounds until the sun burnt out.

Dear Not-Quite-Ex-Boyfriend,

There were six tables of skeletons looking through you on the stage the night we met. Smoke rings covered your hunched back and made your voice a megaphone, which, by the way, you shouldn't be so deceptive on first impressions. For the next girl, be tip-toing through the corridor quiet. Make sure to stand half-moon pose. Smile, but not too bright. Don't want to burn her before she gets too close.

These eyes lingered on the table you sat at after you performed. We both had expected to return home with old stories or fake smiles until I swayed my way over to you and told you I was lifted. I remember being too drunk to tell the truth but not drunk enough to scare you away. Don't say I didn't warn you I had a reputation for going MIA when I said I didn't have time for commitment.

We went brain first into my crazy antics anyway. Pretending to hate my ex so I could keep your company sewed to my thighs for a few months before I left for India. How I said let's be friends before crawling on your lap grasshopper-style, smothering you in sea salt and saliva.

As I traveled through blankets of sweat, down train tracks and dusty roads, I often thought of your hand touching my cheek before the last kiss you gave me. I could feel the loneliness carving its way in. We both knew what I'd done, using you as a sex slaving, dog watching, Jackson spending, not-quite-my-boyfriend souvenir I could take on the plane with me. Sorry.

Tips for Domsday

If you've got a man, let him take the lead.
If he's got a gun, ask him to teach
you how to hold it steady.
You don't know how to live
without packaged food and subjective deception yet
but you'll learn.

There won't be enough time to worry
about your sister, mother, second
cousin, or the decent looking guy who works at the piercing
store in the mall. Pack a bag.
Become translucent.
Do spirit dances in the willowing night by small fires
so the stars can see.
They are the only ones left who care.

Remember what you learned while traveling
through Kerala: never trust wide eyes or
calm hands. You want people worn
down and sunburnt. That means they've been surviving.

You've seen dilapidated houses in Kollam that look
more comfortable than the steel nucleus
called a neighborhood.
There were little boys with hair
to their shoulders,
bending down to drink from the river as you passed
the village. Their smiles reflecting off the surface
looked like svastikas rotating clock-wise.
You went into the waters and noticed how palm trees
have life lines. And heartbeats.
Sat on the bow and let the waves crash into you.
Talked of conspiracy, drugs, and money
until the sun interrupted.

Every day you'll notice something different.
A camera lens on every corner. Sterility served
on a platter. Cities taken over by McDonald's army.
Don't trust the familiar voice when it says
everything is okay.
You'll learn it's not.

Fused

A bottle of Dr. Bronner's Magic
 Soap washed away the smell of masala.
I just had to buy a new scalp afterwards.
 Fifteen travel-sized conditioners turned
this straw hair to ruby slippers and three
 razors ransacked forests growing under
my arms even though I protested. I
 was a different woman already.
Could feel the American dream creeping
 back in.

When my feet touched down they forgot what to
 do, that it takes skill to wade through New York
airports without spontaneously
 combusting or turning to statue. But
after sleeping scarecrow strapped to wooden
 planks and lifejackets I didn't mind
walking wobbly-legged, ranting about
 Muruga's spirit drowning inside me.
Didn't care that peacock feathers were sprouting
 everywhere

and everyone was looking, everyone
 was thinking, which is scary and unwelcome.
The air taking control of my movements. I think of
 past instead of present, fighting to remember stillness.
I know this dream fever won't burn me up and out.
 These walls are see-through in the dark, dark night.
We are all fused together like love bugs
 on this strange orbit to
 illumination.

Begging With Precision

At some point a job becomes a slave trade
or I just become lazy, get fired, and try to collect unemployment.
Sit at the wall until something happens.
Worry myself into ash and hire someone to
sweep the mess onto the carpet.
Start trying to carve oxygen into currency,
anything to keep the Indian dream burning
Bollywood songs and dirt clouds behind my eyes;
until I'm pumped with enough typhoid to kill an army.

On Tuesdays I grab sheets and wrap them around my neck
in my sleep to make people feel for me.
I'll keep trying to sell my soul at half price like it'll
get me a good deal on a plane ticket to Chennai.
Walk shadow streets in search of full pockets
and empty ears: anyone who hasn't heard
enough begging yet because I'm professional.
I'll make you hear me.

At some point the begging gets old,
even with India scorching my skin in the distance.
The vaccines I've taken settle into marrow and I start
second guessing what I'm doing. Start to wither in the daylight,
waiting too long for high dreams.
Then my hands feel the difference in how the sun
rushes them as I step outside.
Everyone staring at the hologram,
not making a move.
Our smiles like paper-mache.
I stick out my arms,
still begging for relief.
Not learning anything.

Dumb Girl Has Something Smart to Say

"I learned the first day not to travel alone," she said,
hanging each word from the roof
of her mouth. The houseboat looked ancient
with woven
ribs and teeth.

We all teetered back and forth, pouring
liquid on ourselves, listening to her story.

Of course
our feet swayed too
close to the water.

Of course, her mouth fell
open and 100 dead lilies scattered
across the deck.

We stopped laughing. Her voice was earthquake.

She laid out lines, let us walk across them slowly,
yelling out numbers and colors.

3 me in a rickshaw. All painted midnight.

1. they were dressed in 90's gweedo
2. one had fire for eyes
3. his hands burnt eagles into her skin

he grabbed chest and throat

4. he told her she'd die that night
5. she believed him
6. the other two giggled like hyenas, hungry for days
7. the rickshaw stopped the men jumped out smiling as they evaporated

She could still feel them staring at her with yellow eyes.

She remembered being invincible as she climbed into the rickshaw.

How quickly power fades into dirt.

The New Intern

Weekend trips were an excuse to find liquor
and break the Indian standards
so when Fiona invited us to go on a houseboat
for the weekend she said we should grab
some of the boys.

Stir things up.

Ten of us congregated to a woven boat
with stories to tell and others to forget.

I watched the new kid turn oblique that night.
Went from silent disco to raging across the deck,
screaming about his new girlfriend and more shots.
Later, we sat together at the edge, looking down
into the black hole swallowing our toes
then wandered to the only available mattress,
too drunk to understand
what we were doing.

I woke up hours later to rum breath on my neck.

It felt familiar and strange.
I was still drunk and stupid, letting
him get too close then pushing him
with iron fist.

It took a few more tries for him to realize
I could turn to stone.

In the morning, he rolled out of bed
and probably looked at me with
my sweaty hair and dirty feet
before going onto the deck.

I think he stared at the water
for an hour and a half
then ate a mango, listening to everyone
recount the dance moves they created the night before.

I walked out, vulnerable and slightly angry
like a wounded tiger.
He tried to focus on anything but me
before making eye contact for five seconds.
It came down to us standing there,
sharing regrets through telekinesis,

both knowing and ignoring
and not quite understanding why we do the things we do.

Savasana

Our first yoga class in India, the sun
had barely opened its eye. 6 a.m. with hair
bundled into electrified ponytails, 6 girls
stumbled down a dirt path leading
to a temple entrance.

We grabbed rugs from a pile in the corner
and hid our excitement when an old
man with a white beard and yellow smile
walked to the front. Sat in lotus.

He got up, pushing our backs flat
against our thighs,
laughing at Rose as she groaned
like palm trees.

He crawled onto Fiona's back, folding his
legs over each other. Using her rubber spine
to practice balance. He was going to kill us.
I knew it. But I let his hands spread

across my lower back without fear. Push me until
I could cradle myself. We didn't believe the light
pulsing through our palms
until we were all lying on our backs like corpses.

The walls moved like tidal waves with every inhale.
They were covered in black and white photos
of the yogi from younger days, twisted like
blankets after night-long sweat battles.

He went back to his rug placed in front of us then
asked for five rupees as we came back into our bodies.
He didn't explain how our limbs exploded then grew back
or why I could feel an eyeball blinking
in the center of my brain.

Plantation Seas

It was a good idea at the time. Just the two of us
getting up at the ass crack of morning to look
for invisible waterfalls in the mountains of Kerala.

We were numb and ready to dive into a riot, if one broke out.

The local at the front desk said to follow the road
like it was the only one.
It's fine that we didn't have our phones
and couldn't speak a word of Tamil.
Or that we decided we could guide ourselves.
Or that we had waltzed into the forest with no maps,
zig-zagging through trees
like Amazonian women
howling at branches in the wind.

Getting lost is part of the human experience.
That's what I told myself as I slid downhill,
came out the other side drowning in a chain of leeches.
I could see tea plants for miles.
We were explorers of new planets.

Our feet hurt and our mouths were deserts
but we talked about how we got to this place.
How scared we used to be when we were locked in corporate cages
and jigsaw relationships.
We didn't care that we walked for miles without seeing
a face or car. Or that the waterfall mission had failed.
We came to the edge where perception bridges understanding.
We understood each other in this place,
lost in the plantation sea.
We were just starting to remember how to swim.

Flea Market Philosophy

All flea markets are the same.
One visit to the Madurai
market leads to
the familiar
sting
of an eyeball
following too close,
yellow tongues shouting discounts at me.

The women snatch my arms and legs
throwing silver bracelets
at my feet.
They string
Rudra's tears around
my neck.

I'm hit by drought
looking at gaudy jewelry
and purses. Insects
bite
at
ankles. Foreign words
bounce off foreheads and hands.
All that's missing is cheap beer and rebel flag belt buckles.

Everything looks the same. Everything is the same.

Three gods come to life on the tapestries
as I dig for sacred truths in triangles and circles.
Start wondering how I got here,
in the middle
of this dusted forest,
naked
and turning into ivory.

Wedding Crasher

Eight men walked around carrying black
pots filled with rice, coconut chutney, and yellow curry with peppers.
They didn't ask if I wanted more, just grabbed food with their fingers,
filled the banana leaf until juices ran too close to my sari.
Water dived into the dirt glass in front of me.
Some girl from France drank it.
The rest of us knew better.
I wandered from my chair to downstairs
where two people were making life vows
while no one listened.
My first day in India, celebrating the wedding
of a man and woman I didn't know.
I was a wedding crasher.

Anne told me the night before that Indian weddings
were like soap dramas. They played every day.
And I wasn't missing much.
Maybe she didn't pay attention.
I couldn't.
I kept thinking about someone
eight thousand miles away every time the priest shouted.
I thought about us spitting
at each other until our mouths were t-shirts.
Him keeping the chain tight around my ankles.
Me hissing whenever he got too close.
There was a time I didn't want the past to be the past.
Listening to the priests chant into the sifted light,
I could see the shadows moving within and without everyone.
I learned the difference between mind and matter.

Repetition

The power went out.
Anything we were writing
was lost so we skipped
work for the rest of the day to
pretend we understood the Sanskrit
carved into ancient walls
levitate four inches off the ground
maybe learn something.

It wasn't comfortable marching up 800 steps
with the guy who was all hands in his sleep,
but sometimes ignoring a situation is easier.
He hadn't said anything to me
since we shared oxygen
on the dirty mattress with holes in it
two weeks before.
We fell into liquid sleep together that night.
His tarantula hands waking me up
not sure how to react because
I was still drunk and normally I'd be down
for anything.

Every hundred steps we came to a resting place.
Sacred flowers stained the columns shading
us from the sun.
Rocks sat like painted
pillows tumbling downhill,
monkeys snuck up behind us to steal
our cameras and food.
We laughed and kept moving.
My mind drowning in sweat.
I wanted to scream into his ear drums
until I knew he was listening
ask him empty questions I've asked before
get full of shit answers.

Lessons in Hallelujah

His hands wage wars and praise gods.
 Like lightning they zigzag across goat skin, beating
 the drum until nothing
but howls echo into the corners of the room.

He knows what he's doing.
Flashing all fingers and teeth. Eight hands
 dancing like broken spider legs,
 calling to heartbeats
 vibrating power throughout our bodies
as I watch and another intern takes pictures.

For twenty minutes we sat in white space.
I asked questions, he listened.
 Said I must hear the answers in order to comprehend them.
I followed as he walked down the hall
toward his room of animal cries and celebration.

The rug stretches underneath me.
 I turn transparent, blast through the window
 into the atmosphere. My skin breaking
into molecules. I still feel the drumbeats pushing me
closer.
His lessons in hallelujah expanding for miles.

Bone Dry

Men don't fall in love.
They trip.
He watched the three of us pile
into the beach villa
without offering to help with our bags,
waiting to see what kind
of foreign girls we were
so he could prepare
for detoxing the room later if needed.

No words juggled between us at first.
He brought food
when we asked and terrible wine
to calm our appetites
then disappeared into the ocean when the sun set.
We heard drums coming from the coastline,
snaking through the walls in the night.
I couldn't stop my feet from moving.

He saw me dancing in the garden,
asked what my hula hoop was,
if I'd make one for him,
where I came from,
and who my parents were.
Called me "pretty American girl"
like it was a compliment.
He made wedding arrangements
after five minutes.
I was bone dry, turning to dust,
listening to him map out our lives.
Knowing that men don't fall in love.
They trip.

Rearrangement

On the stage
two Hindu priests covered
in white powder. Their third eyes blinked
at the crowd.

No music played when she entered. No one
stopped talking to look at her,
decorated in gold,
floating two inches off the ground.

Black and red lotus petals stained her skin
and emerald satin coiled itself around her.
She walked like she didn't know
where to go,
fear hiding between her teeth.
Her mother and father
sat beside her as one priest spoke in Sanskrit.
The other priest smeared
red paste across her forehead.
She vanished behind the curtain
as the groom walked out with his family.
His coal skin stark against the white dhoti.
It took at least an hour for the two
families to join each other.
Molecules pulsed
as the bride's parents
washed the feet of their new son.
Oils passing through the hands of
husband and wife.

I didn't understand why western weddings
were dead. Why we all sit there sit stupefied,
making bets on how long the marriage will last
when two strangers could be laced together in spirit
covered in mosquitos.
Flower petals rained
on our heads.
Our hands collected dust.
I couldn't stop thinking about the fear
I saw in the bride's eyes.
How pure it was when she stood alone.
How it dissolved instantly as she locked hands with her lord.

Conscious Living

I stand like Shiva,
one leg twisted around my body.
Four spirits surround me in spandex.
All of us inhaling wholeness
in unison.

Prana loops my veins, third
eye blinking dirt out
as palms press against the ground.
Every morning we gather in the backyard,
laying out fear on foam mats,
using our chants to turn
the void into geometry.

I've learned to mold love
into necklaces so others can feel it.
Been taught that these hands
can heal. How to balance
my head on concrete
to get fresh perspective.
Took Indian practices to morph
into butterfly.

It's hard to dim this brightness,
living conscious through the darkness.
I've learned the importance of family.
We pour faith back into our brains
during the chaos.
Stay still.
Let our bodies elevate.

Meenakshi

The temple is set up like a Disney ride.
We leave our shoes in cubbies outside
with faith they'll still be there.
Pay five rupees to get in.
Get bags checked at the entrance,
a guard points at Fiona's shirt,
telling her to cover up
because shoulders are offensive.

As we walk through
women hold out cheap
beads with their straw hands.
Toys that are falling apart.
Shouting out prices of Ganesh,
in various sizes and colors.
An elephant blesses you with his trunk
for three rupees. His skin brail
and cracked from wooden sticks.

I wait for meaning to come out of hiding.
Don't want to count the scratches
on his body.
Look into his eyes,
start talking about escape plans.
I realize nothing is sacred anymore.
We are buried in the dust.

Skinned

We're never really alone.

We thought it'd be safe
since no one was around
and the rickshaw dropped us 40 minutes away from the tourist zones.
Exposing so much skin wasn't smart
but the water reached out its skeleton arms to me until I didn't care.
We wanted to sink to the bottom, staple gills to our throats
to escape the heat permanently.
It felt good to be that close to naked in public again.
Bathing suits covering just enough to keep us comfortably unaware
of predator eyes peering from behind a boat
we thought was abandoned on the shore.

We sat on a tapestry, trying to make imprints
of the sand. Wanting to remember exactly how
it felt between our toes. Burning our skin.
Reminding us of how sensitive we were.
The eyes behind us circling like pendulums, off balance
and pulling closer toward HIV cures, to our
naked backs almost begging for the wrong hands.
We thought we were alone out there. Thought it'd be safe.
We made it back to the hotel
with no trauma or scars
but I couldn't stop thinking
about the whites of their eyes.
How we'll burn down anything for solitude when we want it
but we're never really alone.

Coyotes

Dirt licked my toes,
Anne's hair slapping my cheek.
We swerved around dust roads
with no gravity. The moped
speaking in tongues
and us not understanding.
Rose laughed as she drove on,
past propaganda painted on the walls.
None of us sure how to get back
to the hotel.
We called out to the stars
in coyote voices,
lifting our arms above our heads
for as long as we could.
Three wild girls getting lost
in the blanket of India.
Not one of us caring.

Rooftop Propaganda

I bit my brain the day
my hand went through the wall.
 What I've known I've never known.
How to keep these two feet on the ground.
 Not cut the cord before I wake up.
Stay away from anyone missing teeth
and talking propaganda.
For hours I sat on the edge of a rooftop
until mosquitos became too friendly,
dropping saliva out the corners
 of my mouth.
I watched it explode the sand's surface
into a thousand nights.
Let the sweat of darkness sink in,
 palms to pinecones.
My skin unzipped at the cerebellum
and stinging.
I expanded within my crusted ribcage.
 Transformed into dead memories.

Beached

God likes cigarettes
and sometimes pretends to be a drunk Indian man
on Miami beach,
scaring people as they bury themselves in sand.
I can't tell where the world falls off within the dusk
as he stumbles over to the three of us
sitting on a tapestry,
drifting into nines
on a night where the wind smells
like fake numbers and chemicals,
the clouds melting into gray heads.

He asks why we are here
and smoke comes out of his mouth.
It smells like coconut chutney.
We ask him the same question,
all of us laughing at the significance
even though we don't understand it.
Indian hands wave from the ocean,
calling me in.

A cigarette burns in the sand.
He reaches down for it.
Says he's there to make suicide.
We preach few words about love
and light to remind him what it means to be human.
Try our best to show compassion exists.
I keep blinking dirt into my eyes,
seeing elephants walk on water.
He says don't worry as he staggers toward
the velvet curtain waving in the distance.

Mystery Tour

For hours my temple smacked against the edge
of the open window, musty wind
leaving footprints
in my nostrils so it'd be easier to find my way back.

The roads curved like ribcages.
The woman next to me shook in her dreams
while I checked my purse every few minutes
to make sure it was still underneath my seat.

The other girls snored in single beds above me.
I slid into fetal
position, trying to lure sleep in
but the horns outside were distracting
and the eyeballs never blinked.

The bus swayed through dirt and rock,
my teeth chattering with every dip in the road.
I didn't recognize anything as I looked out the window,
letting lukewarm wind smother me.
It didn't matter where we were going,
as long as we were living.
As long as we knew how to get back.