

Jodie Hollander

A Bell from Kathmandu

It was only once in passing that you asked
 I bring you back a bell from Kathmandu.
So the moment I arrived I combed the markets,
 and found your perfect bell and sent it off,
and sent you all the letters I had written:
 recalling long talks between our offices,
and that picnic, where once in the shade
 we snuck a chat, just us, all afternoon.
I recalled the ripe orange you plucked
 from your very own backyard tree,
the first little gift you ever gave to me.
 Back then we agreed we would not meet:
It cannot be, you once said, almost casually—
 meanwhile, it wasn't easy in Kathmandu,
living alone in a cow-dung hut
 by a chicken coop, with no one to talk to.
Every night I listened to howling dogs,
 early each morning the chickens scratched;
and I always heard that same family of mice,
 scuttling in the darkness under my bed.
And then, there were also the rains, the rains,
 seemingly endless all of that September.
I never spoke of that in any letters,
 just sent you the package then disappeared—
and left Kathmandu entirely, without
 giving you the chance to write a reply.
What could I possibly know of love,
 being so young and battling the Himalayas,
always present in my head back then.
 But these days I wonder about that bell,
and wonder about the letters I sent, too.
 What did you think, opening up that box,
likely battered, coming from Kathmandu?
 Perhaps you thought I wasn't seeing reason;
or perhaps you knew how these little fantasies
 carry us through a monsoon season.