Lopamudra Basu

Seeking My Father’s Twin

At my sister’s wedding,
long after I had left the city,
I saw him from afar
silently arranging the chairs under the canopy
seldom making eye contact,
not coming forward to bless the newlyweds,
not claiming the rights of an elder uncle
still breathing and moving,
yet already a ghost.

When asked how many siblings they were
they sometimes counted him
and sometimes forgot,
especially if they had to say,
what each brother or sister did for a living,
Not easy to talk of a twin
without a high school certificate,
working odd jobs, first a steady wage
at a printing press, then declining to day laborer
a night watchman, a guard,
a helping hand in a store,
a twin for whom the loss of youth did not bring
the rotundity of midlife comfort.

When he died two years ago,
alone in a room at the sweet shop he had slept in
I wanted to remember some pieces of childhood.
No conversations came back to me;
perhaps there had not been any.
I only remembered his unpredictable visits
to our house in Behala,
eating quickly from a plate heaped with rice and fish stew,
sitting shirtless in the heat of the humid sun
taking a bucket bath with a piece of pink Lifebuoy soap,
by the well, in the open courtyard,
wrapped in a thin towel,
his hairy back, glistening, wet in the sunlight,
then, drenched in talcum powder
leaving after the day,
my father’s old shirt,
almost fitting his frame,
transient balm for festering wounds:
lacerations begun at birth from the same womb
a few minutes apart, widening into
unbridged chasms of separate destinies,
flowing on different streams
no longer feeling the other’s body
in the dark wetness of amniotic waters,
no longer hearing the heart of a twin.