SAMPURNA CHATTARJI

“Boxes”

Her balcony bears an orchid smuggled in a duffle bag

from Singapore. Its roots cling to air. For two hours

every morning the harsh October sun turns tender

at its leaves. Nine steps from door to balcony and

already she is a giant insect fretting in a jar.

On one side of her one-room home, a stove, where she

cooks dal in an iron pan. The smell of food is good.

Through the window bars the sing-song of voices high

then low in steady arcs. With his back to the wall,

a husband, and a giant stack of quilts, threatening to fall.

Sleeping room only, a note on the door should have read,

readying you for cramp. Fall in and kick off your shoes.

Right angled to this corridor with a bed, trains make tracks

to unfamiliar sounding places. Unhidden by her curtains,

two giant black pigs lie dead, or asleep, on a dump.

Every day the city grows taller, trampling underfoot

students wives lovers babies. The boxes grow smaller.

The sea becomes a distant memory of lashing wave

and neon, siren to seven islands, once. The sky strides

inland on giant stilts, unstoppable, shutting out the light.