**Portable Cactus**

Ateeb Gul

Serene, calm, the commonplaces,

The mere thought and the vision of which

Put a glow where it dared not exist.

Wondering if grief is the commonplace

And temporality its permanence?

Temporality not of time, but of place.

Moving in and out of rented apartments,

Dancing right and left of rented emotions,

Taking our portable cactus wherever we go

For the large ones have already taken root.

Unlike us, who are still lost

(And proud of it),

Searching for a canon large enough

To thrust us into the orbit

Of some lively existence.

Yes, monotony be damned,

But across heavenly distances

Routines are not monotonous.

Jupiter takes an entire youth

To complete the circle of its life.

So you and I could combine our youths

To be sound and still and yet move around;

An adventure that spans thirty years,

Moving after the birth of every happiness.

Is it a sacrifice? A rite of passage?

There’s no right or wrong here

No black, white, or grey—

Only the colors of horizons awaiting

Our longstanding yet temporary arrival.

The hard-earned stability, the routine that we

Learned to cherish and then repeat.

The sudden disappearance; the adjusting

Into a new orbit. Difficult to shrug off

The new look and the new smell.

Did we have to get attached to the walls

And the floors? The angles of the partitions?

They grew on us, almost as if in our sleep—

Permanent muscles on our emotional skeletons.

Who’s to blame for the fact that leaving now hurts?

Physically, even, when hit by the horrific

Possibility of not being able to make a return—

Not even to bid adieu.

What if the heart got what it desired?

And now the world’s a better place;

For everyone else, may be,

Not for us who have imbibed the drug

That never allows us to settle—

The smells of the past call us back.

The new scents of the walls and the fireplace,

Cleaned out and yet burdened

With memories of others.

Settle in, sweetheart, for we are bound to stay

Until the day that we are not.

A new journey, an orbit, a scent, they’ll await us.

Leave your memories behind,

For better ones have to be dancing in anticipation

Just around the corner.