Himalayan Facebook Fiction

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Available at: https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol37/iss2/14

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Acknowledgements
Thanks to Paulzor Dukpa of GO HIMALAYA and Nirmay John Chetri and Karma Lepcha of MARG Stop Human Trafficking Team (Darjeeling, West Bengal) for help with their first anti-trafficking trek and efforts to expose the fictions traffickers use to lure girls from their villages.

This literature is available in HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies: https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol37/iss2/14
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Tenzin eyes the three restless blonde trekkers,
    hairy limbs poked out from North Face pupas,
like his cousin Pema, who woke up in a brothel,
sore as a gutted fish,
bad breath, sweat, impatience condense,
    bead the ceiling.
now cleaning bathrooms at Kennedy airport
    as the trekkers namaste their way around her mop.
Fog huddles in, clouds block Everest,
wet tents sag.
Glossing over the spring break vomit,
she rings her mind of doubt and regret,
He knows they prefer a kind of fucked up fiction,
a Himalayan Pure Land,
earplugs blocking the violence of flushes
    while the industrial toilets suck the shit away,
meanwhile, tea plantations wilt with drought
    dried sky sticks to bushes,
the smell of cleaner like poison to her eyes
    as she looks up as if through cataracts, to accept a tip.
traffickers comb through the ruins
    luring girls fed nothing
At lunch break, she watches Fox News
    prance its gaudy circus of stars.
but Bollywood
    from the lone village TV,
Meanwhile, to pass the time, the trekkers burrow
down to the roots of America’s woes,
comparing them to a more Noble Nepal
Tenzin doesn’t recognize.
To tune them out, he feigns meditation,
quiets himself in the corner, Buddha style,
working his prayer beads.
He’s running out of fictions to feed them,
the ones they post like hornets, stinging friends with envy.
Still, he’s no better,
wants Pema’s bold and beautiful USA
to be good and pure,
even though he suspects
she beams so many pretty lies across the web.

Amidst his staged calm,
(the trekkers lapping up the chance
to post “Our guide, in deep meditation”)
a murder of thoughts erupt:
He could rip their fictions with his fists
if he dared,
like lichen, like lace, so delicately held in tact
clinging across the very ceilings

of their psyches, the gauzy mists moving
from land to land
East and West crossing borders
in a silent pact of deceit,

My Country Tis of Thee
At night Pema flaunts a more glamorous version of herself
on Facebook,
hips jutted out in a cocky stance

Sweet Land of Liberty
Fair and Lovely bleaching her face snow white
til she floats like a moon above the sparkling skyscrapers

Of Thee I sing.

Adrie Kusserow is Professor of Cultural Anthropology at St. Michael's College in Vermont. She is the author of two books of poetry, Hunting Down the Monk and REFUGE (BOA Editions), and an ethnography, American Individualisms (Palgrave MacMillan). Most recently her poems have been published in American Poetry Review and Anthropology and Humanism. Her current ethnographic and humanitarian work focuses on anti-trafficking awareness raising efforts with the non-profit MARG, based in Darjeeling, West Bengal, India.

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