

Trying to Find the Indian Family in Millennium Park, Chicago

for MT

This is a town you know
in ways I never will.
The last time I was here,
freeways switching lanes
on me indecipherably, landed me
at a Chinatown exit with no corresponding
on ramp, wandering under girders
among horns blasting me, a bat lost
in a cathedral, your digital voice
a beacon, telling me right
here, then left, and arriving
to you, on the front porch.
Though I have faced Dallas,
Los Angeles, Manhattan,
I never wanted to drive
in this city again.

But this night, I have arrived
at Evanston, and we take
the El downtown, navigating
tokens, exact change, hit
a Mexican place, and now,
because it is four years
into the new century,
and because we haven't seen
each other in a while, and
because I am only passing
through, and because this is a town
you know, and because, always,
you try to expand my knowledge
base, orientation in the world,
and because it is a beautiful night
in early October, and because we know
the toll our northern winters take
on us, you suggest we jump back
on, glide above the streets for a few
more stops, enter the Millennium
Park. I, of course plead, as always,
ignorance, ignorance, the Midwest
a wide open question mark to me.

It is four years, almost to the month,
before this country will change the course
of its history, elect a melanin-rich
President, announced on this same land
near the southwestern lip of Lake Michigan,
but on this night, in 2004, neither of us,
our Indian writing imaginations, even

combined, could not have imagined that story.

I ask what it is we'll find at the Park,
and you are incredulous at my lack
of knowledge beyond the confines of New York,
and just suggest it often has contemporary art
installations, and that this will be a moment
of discovery for me. When we arrive, you are
not proven wrong.

First, we stand beneath the giant chrome
kidney, jelly bean, the Sky Gate, our dark-skinned,
aging reflections distort us like amoebae,
and I could probably stay here a while,
watching myself reach up, become tall
for once, but our attention is drawn
to a different installation, something
called "The American Family," life
sized photo panels of mothers, fathers,
sisters and brothers, Amish, Muslims,
corn-fed Nordic Nebraskans, Italians,
Germans, Africans, African-Americans, Chinese,
Mongolians, Japanese, Thai, Hmong, Ukrainians,
Cajuns, and of course the list goes on,
but because we have both been disappeared,
our indigenous binary code stripped
from the equation, time and time
again, like so much war-paint, we make
it a pilgrimage, one panel at a time. Other
visitors, delighting in finding themselves
represented here, begin to notice
our exasperation, feigned and over
dramatic and first, more real with each
passing panel, and still no American
Indian families, not one--the closest
we get is the Mexican family, complete
with serapes and sombreros.

We eventually arrive where we began,
the Sky Gate, the Star-kidney, knowing,
as the autumn reminds us it's coming,
air around us sharper, seeping
into our bones, like blood in earth.
It is here we find the American Indian
family, our chrome reflections on the underside
of the sculpture, like two small atlases, holding
everything suspended, illuminated in street lamps
coming on one by one, while above, the light
of a million dying stars, arrives, joins us
in reflection, and the coming of another
harvest moon, where dispersed seed carries on.

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