

1994

Wild Blossom

Chandani Lokuge

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>

Recommended Citation

Lokuge, Chandani, Wild Blossom, *Kunapipi*, 16(1), 1994.
Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol16/iss1/37>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Wild Blossom

Abstract

Shanthi. Shanthi. Let shanthi soothe my mind. But it eludes. The anguished body still lives. And the sporadic screams that rent the silence. I clawed the earth and the foetus struggled to be free. Struggled to push out of the tightening cervix. Father? It cannot be. You do not know of this, yet. You sought from me such glory. And I have failed. I have failed. What have I given you but a useless grand daughter. A curse. Sumana. Sumana, take her away. I must give her away. The blood oozes and soaks the thighs. The body still quivers with remembered spasms. There was passion before. Yes. Rohana would say to me, Rukmali you are so full of passion - you attract chaos. But I have no passion left. I am emptied. Rohana, you and the country.

CHANDANI LOKUGÉ

Wild Blossom

Shanthi. Shanthi. Let shanthi soothe my mind. But it eludes. The anguished body still lives. And the sporadic screams that rent the silence. I clawed the earth and the foetus struggled to be free. Struggled to push out of the tightening cervix. Father? It cannot be. You do not know of this, yet. You sought from me such glory. And I have failed. I have failed. What have I given you but a useless grand daughter. A curse. Sumana. Sumana, take her away. I must give her away. The blood oozes and soaks the thighs. The body still quivers with remembered spasms. There was passion before. Yes. Rohana would say to me, Rukmali you are so full of passion – you attract chaos. But I have no passion left. I am emptied. Rohana, you and the country. Together, you have sucked it out of me. By the empty well, I thrust the endaru between my legs and through the vagina. Searingly, it penetrated. And it was eight months too late. I was insane. And the hurt struck like lightening. Streaks of lightening. I clutched the pain. I would force it back. But it streaked through the body like the death shriek of friends. Later some of their bodies were thrown into the river. The bodies floated in the water and the swollen river bore them away. All is black-red again and I am a spasm of pain. It tore my insides, the doctor said. The hospital walls are white and stark. The nurse bears a hard cold face. You didn't think of the pain when you conceived the brat? And where is the father? Her words echo like drum beats in a silent night. Or like gun shots. My father. I have shamed and humiliated you. Neighbours will throw stones and buckets of dirt at our front door. I had to do it. I had to get rid of it. I would hide it in the bottom of the shallow well. And it would dry up there wrapped in the scrap of cloth. A stray dog would find it in the morning. And leave no trace. Except the bloodied rag. In the dark hours before dawn, it struggled free of my body. And I held it. I could not drop it in the well. My daughter. Forgive me. I have wronged you. You must live. You have mind and body, feeling and perception. And I will call you Shanthi. And you will be peace.

The two old people sit by the bedside. The old man stands up tiredly and moving up to the low parapet wall, spits red betel juice into the drain outside. The crow caws loudly, perched on the roof just above. The old man shoos it away, and looks hastily over his shoulder at Rukmali, stirring restlessly on the narrow hospital bed. White as the sheet she is, he mutters – my beautiful flower. But he does not desire her recovery. In all

his actions there is love. But he cannot accept what she has become, possessed by Mara and defiled. He presses his fingers to his eyes. He remembers how she was crowned Avurudhu Kumari at the village New Year Festival, two years ago. He hears the cheering. He sees her lovely face and slender form as she walks up the stage. The long dark eyes like blue lotus-buds and the lips like tender na leaves. Long, long black hair. He sees her presented with fresh-hued flowers and crowned with a gold paper crown. As she walks away she turns and smiles with him. And he chokes with pride. She made up for a hundred sons. In every way. Just as her horoscope had predicted. There was no son to till the land, but there was Rukmali. She was destined for greater things than the land. She would bring the family fame and glory. His clever, beautiful daughter. He removes his fingers from his eyes. He gazes at them emptily. They are wet with tears. And calloused. The nails are broken and edged with dirt. What was he but a humble farmer. But he had walked proud and straight because of Rukmali. She had entered the university. *His* Rukmali. No one else in his hamlet had managed that. Not even the magistrate hamudoru's son from the neighbouring big town. He could barely meet the expense. And so he had mortgaged the land even against his wife's wish. What about the rest of the family, she had protested. What about the younger girls? Rukmali will look after them, he had silenced her confidently. When she graduates and gets a good government job, she will support the younger ones. I tilled the land for her, he said, for Rukmali. For no one else. His hands tremble and he lets them drop to his sides. And then suddenly she vanished. Out of his reach. They whispered in the village that she had joined the insurgents. That she lived in the jungles many miles away. They said she was a leader. He knew then that he had lost her. And he wept. When she was a little girl and fell into the mud in the paddy field he had picked her up. He had wiped her legs roughly with his palms and steadied her. When she ran ahead of him again, along the narrow bund, he had warned her, gently, of the mud on either side. He had coerced her swift passionate spirit to the temple where the monk had taught her the dhamma. He had watched her offer flowers at the sacred feet of the Buddha, in a long flowing white cloth. And thought her disciplined at last, and subdued. But she had yearned to fly. And he would not tether her like his buffalo to the threshing floor. When he boarded her in the Central School many miles away from the village, he had said to her – May you achieve your desires. You are a pride to me, daughter, all my hopes bear fruit in you. And he had bestowed on her the blessings of the Triple Gem. There had been sadness in his heart but overriding the sadness, pride and joy.

The crow caws again loudly. The old man walks vaguely out of the ward, picks up a stone and aims it at the crow. It must not disturb Rukmali with its noise. He turns to go back to the ward. The old woman has risen and is bending over Rukmali. He sees her tears fall drop by drop

on the blanched face. Rukmali is dead. The light is extinguished. Darkness falls over darkness. What has he now, that his daughter is dead? She is borne away by the strong winds of Mara. His lovely wild blossom, full of vibrant colour; full of potent fragrance. And now she is faded; malodorous and unlovely. Where would her consciousness find refuge? He is spent with the griefs of attachment. Fleeting, he remembers his two younger daughters. The police had dragged them out of the house, once they had heard about Rukmali's part in the revolution, and had shot them before his eyes. He begins to understand a dhammapada that he had chanted meaninglessly all his life: 'From affection arises sorrow; from affection arises fear; to him who is freed from affection there is no sorrow and there is no fear from anywhere'. Sumana lifts the infant out of its crib and carries it out of the ward. His wife, still bending over Rukmali gazes after Sumana and then turns round and looks at him. But he will not meet her eyes. He would be free. He seeks nothing to rest beneath the bo-tree in the village temple. He begins to walk away.

But father, the child is mine and I will hover over her. Conceived in tortured passion when the full moon sparked impossible dreams. We conceived freedom. Employment! Equality! We would be free of feudal bondage! But we miscarried. And died miscarrying. Later, we dragged out the bodies. Mostly dead. Mostly body parts. Those who still writhed were put to sleep like dogs who were in agony and of no further use. I saw Rohana shoot Asitha through the ear. Rohana who had lain in my arms a few nights before. Our passion was frenzied. There was no time. No time for anything but the guns, the bombs, the freedom we sought – for ourselves, for the country. For our children. We will create a child, Rohana said, yours and mine – for freedom. He will reap the harvest of our toil, Rohana said. We made love. We were not sane. Victory or death was just around the corner. We crouched in the jungle. We awaited the appointed day, the hour. The final night stretched endlessly. Suddenly, the hyena laughed and signalled in human voice. Soldiers swarmed around us. Bullets raped the night. The government did not fall into our hands. We fell into theirs. Those who died were fortunate. I was dragged through the village centre. Later, I was raped by the soldiers at the station. One after another they raped me. I bit my lips and held back the screams. It was cold and brutal. Then they took me away to the prison. My nails were split for information. Eight months later, heavy with child, I escaped. To the well. To the empty well that lay forgotten in the vacant lands behind the university. Whose child have I given life to?

Peace is maya. Happiness is maya. Freedom is maya. I am denied. The consciousness wanders between births. Deluded. But through the infinite distance of my childhood, I hear the temple bells. And the chant of monks. I run to my father. Together, we insert bo-leaves between the pages of my book of scriptures. Each week, out of the golden sand, we pick a fresh green leaf that the tree has just shed. At the end of the year, I flick the

pages and the leaves flutter down to the table, in different shades of green-brown. Some are worn away to skeletons. I touch the slight veins on a dried leaf, so fragile and brown. You too will go to the temple, my little one. May you be drawn by its peace like my father was. My first and last wish for you is shanthi.

Ania Walwicz's *Vagrant Narration*:

(Ext. from a novella in progress based on the 1971 youth insurrection in Sri Lanka.)



...the possibility of treating and probes the fluid, shifting, and complex space of the traveler. My discussion of red text will suggest that narrative literature is characterized as much by cosmopolitan as by national formations, by figurations of migrancy as much as by those of ethnic specificity.

...is clearly a book that hovers on the border between authorial and fiction. Autobiography has traditionally explored the lives of representable individuals, whose representativeness articulates dominant or subordinate positions and their consequences. Similarly, representable, but of the collective quality of a minority group, a constituency that has been shown to be also representatively political in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari describe all minority texts as political.⁴ The autobiographies and