

Journey

by Shelagh Power-Chopra

What's the weather like there, murky, cheerless, horribly disagreeable? Are you in that wave of absent summer; where shade and fog scamper after you, even in full sunlight?

It's damn hot here, merciless—a word we Indians tend to attach seamlessly to the weather, the pavement is boiling and I'm wearing wingtips—for heaven's sake, half my countrymen surrounding me are wearing wingtips!

In this bloody heat! This godforsaken sun bearing down on us; the multitudes in our boxy cheap suits, and the poor wearing torn trousers and white *badans*; cattle calls to work and home. I long to wear my chapals—no not those fancy ones you Americans don, all strappy and expensive.

Here they're a simple rubber, much like the ones you tend to find on a beach roadside in America—worn and dull blue, the rubber chewed up at the heel. The wingtips are an idea of my father's: one must be presentable on the street, so you don't look like the riffraff, but I adore the riffraff, don't I?

I'm beginning to wonder. I'm not enjoying the chaos, thought I would but I've become so used to a certain nothingness, a barrenness; fields of soft crops, dirt roads, prolific highways leading to little-after all I could walk a mile there without seeing a man, one man!

Here I see twenty within two feet! Had I forgotten my childhood here? Had I forgotten the everyday was filled with teems of people, relatives, sound and sounds, smells and smells.

Half of what I say is meaningless but I say it just to reach you —

Do you know this song, Julia? I happened upon it one evening and only just before meeting you, a month before meeting, a month before arriving?

It's a quiet song, not made for this country. I long to go up to the hills but know I'd come running down in fear of losing sound, any sound.

Julia, Julia.

