

The Grasshoppers' Silence

Listen to the story the prisoner's wife
hears in the Bengali darkness: the
one he'd told her about a grasshopper
he'd caught in his sweep net at dusk
and taken home in a glass jar with
breathing holes punched in the lid.

*"Why do boys catch insects?" she'd asked,
and he'd answered: "Because they are lonely."*

He told her the alarmed grasshopper
fiddled, rubbing its leg against its
belly. In Bangladesh, as in China,
ancient violins have one string; and
they sing in minor keys. "Why is their
music so sad?" she asked him, even
though she already knew the answer.

"Their music is sad because grasshoppers are sad."

In Bangladesh, unfaithful women are
called "grasshoppers," because the
adulteresses jump from leaf to leaf
in monsoon swamps. "Don't ever leave
me," her husband had ordered his
captive insect, pulling off one of its
legs before he made it a suit of rags.

"Did it ever sing after that?" she'd asked.

His wife was a curious woman who'd
gazed past the Chittagong Hills to praise
the sunrise, its clamorous golds and
vermilions. "Don't you ever leave me,"
he'd said to her every time she opened
a book or looked out the window, her
eyes astonished as water lilies opening

to the first light of dawn. And that one last time, “You left me,” tearing out her eyes and leaving them both alone in the dark—her in a room without windows and him in the prison he’d made for himself, listening to the grasshoppers’ silence.

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