

## The River of Forgetting

Standing on the riverbank, the man cradled a small package  
as he negotiated with a nearby boatman.

Then he waded into the River Ganges and placed  
the package—a loaf-sized bundle wrapped in gold cloth,  
tied to a flat stone—onto the v-shaped keel  
before climbing on-board.

The boatman dug the oars in  
and moved them out towards the middle.

On the riverbank, a youngster was playing a kite,  
his gleaming eyes, black as headstone marble, looking skyward,  
to where a shovel of white pigeons flew out from a tower.

Barking dogs broke into a fight and I looked over to see them scatter  
between the black cows, garlanded in marigolds,  
standing entranced on the riverside steps that fed down into the water  
below the sandalwood-orange cremation-fires of a burning Ghat  
as people promenaded past enjoying the morning sun.

Near the middle of the river, the boatman raised the oars.  
The man stood up, lifted the loaf-sized nugget  
and dropped it into the river without ceremony.

The boatman lowered the oars  
and rowed in.

The boy's purple kite,  
a diamond strip cut from a plastic bag  
and fixed to a bamboo crucifix,  
dived and twirled through the air  
like a dolphin swimming invisible currents,  
its nose sifting through the unseen  
as it surges down into the blind sea.  
When I looked down again the man was gone.

The boatman, perched at the back of the boat,  
was smoking a cigarette.

Gilded into the alluvial veins of my memory  
is myself turning to look out towards the middle of the Ganges:  
the surface was still—sealed over,  
like the mind of the father,  
through whose unfathomable waters,  
embossed deep down, tied to a flat stone slab,  
his shrouded child plummets.

PAUL MCMAHON