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Sir Oxford Parker

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Sir Oxford Parker

Nancy E. Wright

You were the only stray dog whose head I dared to stroke
gingerly, only with fingertips.
In front of the Park Hotel, your grey-brown splotches of coat
blended with dusty curb's edge.
You would remain there, sniffing early smoke and cooking spices
until eight, when Kolkata's heavy morning traffic
convinced you to amble to the front of the Oxford Bookstore.
On your side there all morning,
while ever hotter sunbeams bathed your tired ribs,
you never blocked the bookworms' path.
At noon, when the restaurant Trincas opened,
you would hobble to its front door and stretch out.
Sometimes a server would toss you biscuits.
At five, when live music began in the restaurant lounge,
you changed your post slightly,
crawling to the door where the musicians had entered.
You remained on the sidewalk late, your deaf ears soaking in vibrations
of jazz and sometimes piercing treble vocals.

The first food I offered you was lamb lasagna.
The flavor, which you tasted while prone, half-asleep
awakened you to a sitting position.
I discovered you were toothless,
when the little chicken sausages I brought you
rolled from your mouth.
From that point I broke each one in half.
The hotel breakfast staff knew why I loaded my plate
and then asked for a to-go container.
They never said anything.

Ellipsis

I brought you large mutton bones, which I thought you could lick.
You gummed them, your sightless eyes nostalgic.
You turned away from egg drop soup, but lapped mutton gravy
as if it were ambrosia.

Sir Oxford Parker,
your greatest gift to me was aloofness,
which spared me heartbreak when it was time to leave India.
About a month after my departure,
a hotel manager wrote to inform me
that she had not seen you in some time
and thought you may have passed.
I cannot follow you, nor can you follow me.
Thank you for a sweet memory without attachment.