

Poetry

Michelle C. Liu

a hospital snack counter in India

at noon, the elderly
and sick and worried
stand in queue
to order hot teas in metal saucers,
fried cheese and samosas
dipped in chutney. fingertips stain
with oil and
spices, hands tremble, lips
quiver, a cough.
the healthy and sick—
waiting together, eating
with hands,
hair sticking to foreheads,
yesterday's newspapers folded
into fans, sifting through
the thick, spicy air

a poem about surveying villagers

they appeared foolishly
happy, the village
men, whispering and giggling
over the American
papers in their hands.

they wore black slacks and
white button-downs, collars stained
from the afternoons
outside; soil and dust
that even rough
soap and coarse hands
could not scrub away.

they sat cross-legged and barefoot,
grasping their pens awkwardly
in their fingers, writing at odd
angles, scratching their heads,
examining the ink on the page,
with care.

the minutes passed and they smiled
at each other, there was no hurry,
only moments
to fill in.

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From the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, NY.
Received October 20, 2013; accepted October 24, 2013. Address corre-
spondence to M.C.L.; e-mail: Mich.C.Liu@gmail.com

Michelle Liu is a fourth-year medical student at the Icahn School of
Medicine at Mount Sinai. She traveled to Baroda, Gujarat, India, in
September 2013 to conduct a study focusing on community knowledge
of and attitudes about clinical depression.

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on the road to *Baroda*

I.

beeping, honking
auto-rickshaws, exhaust fumes
banana trees, paddy fields
government warehouses behind rusting
iron gates, concrete buildings with
peeling facades, colorful *kurtas* and
bedsheets billowing
from apartment windows

II.

a bull on the road
moves off the dirt path, its tail
swinging, flies circulating around
moist nostrils

III.

motorcycles pass
with entire families:
grandmothers in flowing saris,
feet dangling off the side, brass
toe rings and scarlet nail polish.
construction workers, scrawny and
tanned, packed together.