

WHY WE ARE HERE

Nothing had happened last night.
An old woman sitting on the temple steps
had slumped forward, head over her chest,
her nipples hanging on her skin like two screws.

The day walked by
dragging my body into a long walk.
After years of humble endurance my father's death
waited for me in a woman's eyes.
It was a good time to think,
though in truth there was no need to;
here was a thought about deaths picking one death
and to let go my death to hold onto another's.

Back through familiar places,
the ruins of love and devotion, when the road
doesn't make one find what one is looking for
but the doodle one made once with a worn-out pen,
when time spills across the eyes in tottering farewells,
and only the worn handrail is there to hold,
the magic of the day makes me feel the even breath
of the person just behind me upon my neck.

Jayanta Mahapatra (Odisha)