

Vinita Agrawal

## The Central Asian Flyway & the Apricot Farmer of Ladakh

In Hanuthang,  
some miles north of Ladakh,  
a blood and bones farmer  
surveys open-mouthed,  
this year's mound of apricot crop— rotten and decayed  
devoured by aphids and mealybugs.

Months of tending, watering, nurturing, pruning, giving,  
reduced to mush by pests.  
His death-fossil of a back, broken.

He surveys the loss  
with one hand on his heart  
the other, twirling rosary beads.  
His breath shaken,  
he eagerly awaits an avian army  
to come to his rescue.

Two months into summer,  
when the apricots turn sienna-gold and succulent,  
he scans the horizon for birds.

Thrushes and Plovers,  
Stints and Wheatears,  
they haven't flown in this season;  
insects have flourished.

Cirques of clean-shaven mountains  
spread their arms out wide  
as if they own the planet.  
But not a bird in sight.

Spring migration  
has succumbed to rising temperatures.  
The sky gazes  
unblinkingly at itself  
in hushed mirror-lakes.

The Central Asian Flyway  
stares self-consciously  
into the farmer's watery eyes.

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