An excerpt from *Foreign Madam and the White Yogi*

a novel in verse

**Chichester and the Bhagavad Gita**

Atlantic crossing by air
a touch down at Gatwick
a cockney Indian giving directions
a chrome train south to Sussex
a mess of bags kids passengers
a red brick city going green
a journey winding toward sunset
a pulling in at Chichester Station
a ticking taxi to a country cottage
a friend’s cottage lent for a long weekend
an old brass key beneath the mat
a hill of bags dumped in the hall
a welcome note under the fruit bowl
a rag-doll child carried upstairs
a sleepwalk dance to their beds
a ceramic lamp left on between them
a creaky, slow descent downstairs
a fire built up from the wood box
a cup of tomato soup with rye
a quiet relax in front of the fire
a slowing down to red coals
a chiming clock, its after-silence
a fragrant stick of nāg champa
a nestling into forgetting
two souls recharge on a velvet sofa

*

"Mum, can I pour?" "Mum, can I flip?"
asked Pauline, asked Adele. “Mum, where's the sugar?"
"Mummy! Where's the lemon juice?"
"Take it easy. I'll try the pantry."

Pauline dragged an animal squeal from a chair.
Up there, they perched, Adele spatula-armed

---

Chris Mooney-Singh. 'Chichester and the Bhagavad Gita’.


on their lazy Sunday pancake fun-day, although it's Monday. Forgetful, happy

they're sprinkling English sugar on lemon juice, knife and forking through the filigree crepes, until the buttery nostalgia starts to bloat.
"Mum, when are we going home?

Dissatisfied it came, that same complaining.

*

Yogi slumped on the front room floor
the Bhagavad Gita in his hand,
picked up that day in Singapore,
a guide book to his promised land.

The Gita was a Q and A:
Arjuna is on the battleground
quizzing Krishna why he must slay
beloved ones. His heart unwound:

\textit{better to let the heart object}
\textit{before killing off kinsmen, gurus.}
\textit{One bad act has its ripple effect.}
\textit{Arjuna slumps before the Kurus*}

like poor Yogi on the floor,
wondering how to win his fight
with little girls still waging war
ever since his wedding night.

*

Now came their outing hour with hats and coats
from the winding Dimple Lane toward Chichester.
Paul had headphone ears, Dele had fox glass eyes
sitting with adult minders; now taxi time trundled

\* Dynastic clan including both warring cousin factions of Pandavas and the Kauravas that are centre character of the Mahabharata.

down hedgerow lanes banked by lavender fields.

A snowy gaggle of geese waddled onto the road, the barking terrier of a man came running behind, arms waving. White honkers skipped and wrangled through a hole in a hedge. "Look!" said Yogi stepdad. The girls plugged in devices, blocking the Enemy.

* 

Nine
AD
Nor-
man
spire
kept
God
inside
safe
towns

see the floor-plan
centred cross  go altarwards
progress pilgrim
humbly step up  to Heaven
then
back
to
earth
Does
the
higher
life
start
when
needs
are
met?
Please
tell
right
now
Left to wander about
Adele and sister Paul
dawdled down the aisle
not so very impressed
by the nine-point star
parquetry underfoot,
nor the vaulted roof,
cross-ribbed like a Viking
longboat upside down,
nor the arches in stone
supporting a long nave,
nor each polished pew
lit by candleholders,
nor the organ playing
tunes decidedly dead
to funky ears. They will
walk the aisle to meet
their future husbands,
receive rings, take vows.
Today, however, they
are far too young to care
a fig-leaf for anything
other than strawberry,
double-ripple ice-creams
they have been promised.

*Margaret and her lover rock
side to side and forget the clock,
finding respite as two, not four,
like Richard the Earl and Eleanor
who clasp palms in white repose,
lap dogs snoozing at their toes
of Arundel's tomb once noble throne,
six hundred loving years in stone.

And yes, today life gasps at death
as loving marble holds its breath.

Chagall uplifts now red and blue
Creation's dancing stained-glass view,

and fires of love ride up, roughshod
across the panes breathed on by God.

Inspirited, the Yogi slips
a simple kiss onto her lips.

*

Lunch and double ice cream. A signpost walk
to museums, pubs, a flower show, cream tea,
an hour's stroll around the Roman wall
that's been five metres tall two thousand years.

The girls were not adventurers - just bored
and scuffed their sneaker heels upon the path,
this history walk far from Adelaide,
talking about Papa.

"Can we call later?
I'm tired, Mummy," moaned Pauline. "Let's go!"
While Dele played Glass Eyes. Poor Margaret
knew the game was up. It was time to get
a sleepy cab at the Square.

Away they went.
Ms Earphones hardly saw the languid river.
Ms Glass Eyes paid no heed to the bumpy bridge,
stone-masoned, where those haloes of black gnats
were fish-food hour above the emerald scum.
A man was casting a fly beyond the midges.

"Stop the cab," said Yogi.

"Do we have to?"
The girls complained.
"Yes, for a second," he said. The driver braked. Yogi wound down his window to see the taut line whiplash – a leaping fish was making its escape across the water. The angler worked his line. Soon all heard the scream of the reel as a fighter took the bait. The fish lunged off to the right, until the angler checked him as he raced, causing fibreglass to bend and make a parabola in air. The fish exploded through a hole in the scum and flew till the dorsal smacked back like a hand, then plunged once more, grappling with coated line taut against its body. The warrior fought with one last lunge upward from the algae depths as if to ram the enemy and then fell slack. The fight was over. The fisherman reeled in and scooped the prize of silver in his net.

"He caught it, Mummy!" said the fierce Pauline. Adele was silent. She was ever thoughtful, while Yogi was remembering his father – the weekend angler with an outdoors ego, so deft and quick, unlike inadequate Yogi. They once went fishing up the Shoalhaven River. Yogi caught nothing, while the Expert coaxed a big brown trout from its hide-hole with a spinner cast out and dropped below the spitting falls. The fish was childhood thrashing up against his Dad.

He flinched and wound the window up. "Hey mate, let's go," said Yogi. And so the cab puttered homebound back to Dimple Lane.

* 

Arriving back, they bathed and lit a fire. Yogi piled up steaming pasta mountains. Cheesy peace achieved, the girls were lolling each side of their mother’s comfy contour possessing the country of her blanket lap.
He sighed upon his own chair, separated from the threesome on the mainland sofa; and did he not deserve a passing glance? He counted up three countries left behind. What was his role? The bagman? Staring ahead Margot stroked the fringes of her girls, as red to green the fire along the log inflamed his neediness. Where was that set of Bhagavad Gita Cards? He rescued them from the cushion crevice of his armchair, then shuffled hard, a forlorn bibliomancer, selecting one at random:

_O Arjuna,
The best of yogis sees one Self in being after being
and feels each single pain and pleasure as one’s own._

How far was he from yoga’s skill in action? He decked the card, thinking: at least he could sit back to watch the sun set in the yew. The trickster tree was shuffling a clutch of larks. He tightly held the Gita Cards and worries.

Funny, he thought. _Is this the lesson then? Become a tree and learn to shuffle birds?_

The girls slept on. At last, she looked across. Most men make raids like north men and take off. but he was her Green Man. Carrying girls upstairs he seemed relieved. At last, she needed him.

_Chris Mooney-Singh_