

## *Ode to Her Legs*

*Ok, before your eyes start glinting  
And your mouth registers the curve of a smile,  
Let me tell you it's not that kind of poem—*

*The kind that begins innocuously at the ankles,  
Pirouettes around a taut yet supple calf  
To boldly expose the thunder of thighs.*

*For one thing, this is not Marilyn Monroe airing  
Her crotch on a sultry New York night.  
Nor Angie Dickinson, that faded poster girl, serving up*

*Her most celebrated parts.  
Neither is this a Broadway line-up of flesh disguised  
In frills, feathers, lace – the legs, one mass entity propelled*

*By the music. No, these are not baton-twirling legs,  
Ballerina legs, ice-skating legs, or trapeze-artist legs!  
These legs are not airborne, leaping off*

*A diving board to pierce the water like an arrow.  
Though having said that, the legs I sing  
Are classic too. And graceful, and as daring*

*As those other beauties born to perform,  
With one difference. Her legs work unseen, out of public view.  
At this point in the poem you make an imaginative leap.*

*Where she comes from, legs are the least  
Extolled part of the body, living a secret life  
Cool and dark, veiled in silk or cotton, blooming*

*Incognito. But forget the legs for a moment.  
We never were Victorian, pinning our lust  
On flash of ankle or heave of bosom.*

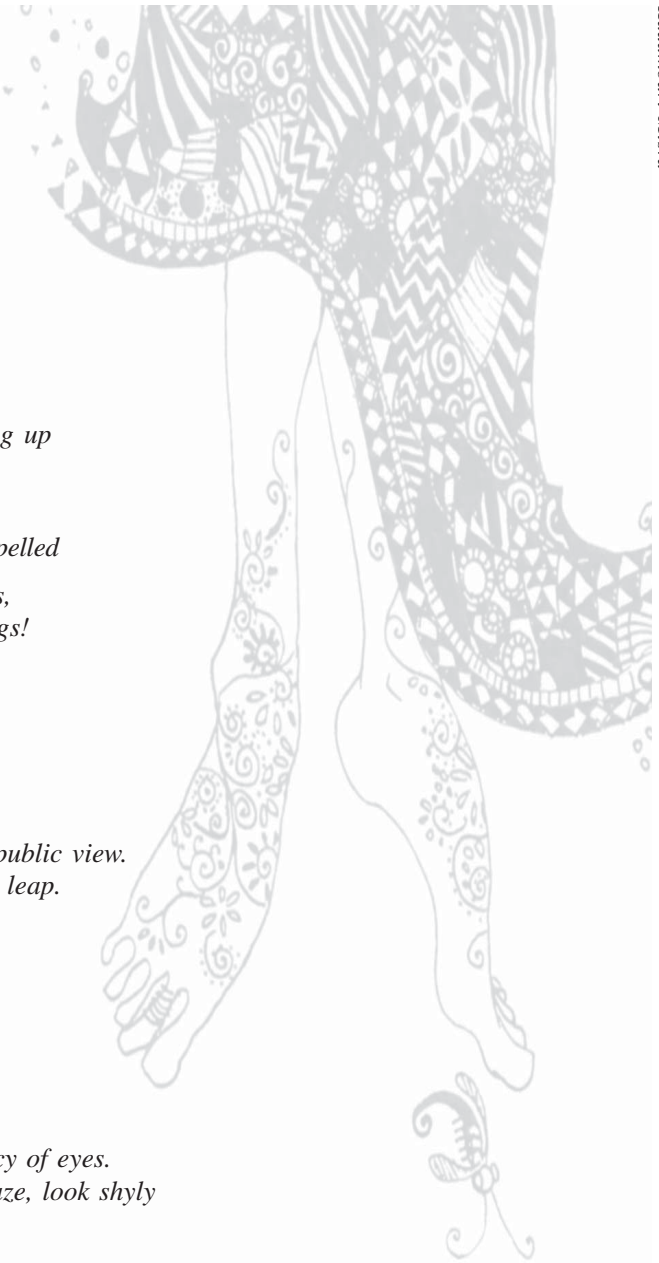
*We cultivated other themes. Consider the epic legacy of eyes.  
Look how much work they do: they simmer and blaze, look shyly  
Away or straight through*

*Your intentions, leaving you puzzled or wounded.  
The real place of mystery is  
The hair – plain or adorned – thick, black, lustrous, fragrant,*

*Bound by years of grooming rituals.  
Hair driving poets to drink, loosening  
Their metaphors, confounding their logic.*

*Equally enigmatic is that midriff space between  
Blouse and sari – glistening with beads of sweat –  
That shapely curve of waist swiveling in the light*

*Of day. With so much to adore who misses the legs?  
Ah, the legs. Back to those legs.  
Having made the shift, perhaps you are now ready*





*To understand why it is not that kind of poem.  
For not being seen or displaying their art in public,  
Those legs are no less unique. They come equipped*

*With power and purpose. Think of them as pillars  
That hold your world upright, that keep your days  
In order. Everywhere – behind counters, desks,*

*In hospitals, mills, fields, factory floors;  
In sweatshops, bazaars, stores, and offices – a woman  
Is standing, waiting or running, her legs clocking*

*Miles in silence. When everyone else is off-duty  
Her feet are still plodding. When there is no one else  
To count on, she unfailingly answers*

*Your call. As for being bone-weary, you have no idea  
What she endures. So I say to the men  
(And some expensive, pampered women):*

*Recognize the wonder of those legs, ignore them  
At your peril. Because, when those legs fail,  
You will have nothing to stand on.*

*To the husbands, I say:  
Give those legs the respect they deserve. Look at those  
Feet in amazement – how small and tough the heel,*

*The skin ready to crack. The toes, though shy,  
Will stay the course; the ankles are so slender  
For the burden they carry; knees, the pivot*

*Of your universe. So, let her stretch out and place her feet  
In your hands. Everyday. After all, she has lavished  
Attention and care, devotedly tending your feet every night*

*Which you have taken as your birthright  
Citing scripture and myth in your defense.  
Well, here is your service manual: Stroke and press those legs*

*All the way up where the muscles knot  
And veins break out and throb. Knead  
The flesh firmly, gently, to draw out the day's*

*Weariness out of the body. Now work downwards  
Soothing the ache with fingertips as if the feet  
Had been long lost and just found. Cherish them*

*As if those legs were the most precious and prized  
Of your belongings; as if you were under oath  
To God to keep your holy promises. It may turn out*

*That Heaven lies underneath a woman's feet.  
Honor them as if they were – but they are –  
Your beloved's legs.*

**Saleem Peeradina**