

## The Old Playhouse

**Kamala Das**

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her  
In the long summer of your love so that she would forget  
Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but  
Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless  
Pathways of the sky.  
It was not to gather knowledge  
Of yet another man that I came to you but to learn  
What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, but every  
Lesson you gave was about yourself.  
You were pleased  
With my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow  
Convulsions.  
You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured yourself into  
every nook and cranny, you embalmed  
My poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices.  
You called me wife, I was taught to break saccharine into your  
tea and To offer at the right moment the vitamins.  
Cowering Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf  
and Became a dwarf.  
I lost my will and reason, to all your Questions I mumbled  
incoherent replies. The summer Begins to pall. I remember the  
rudder breezes  
Of the fall and the smoke from the burning leaves. Your room is  
Always lit by artificial lights, your windows always Shut. Even  
the air-conditioner helps so little,  
All pervasive is the male scent of your breath. The cut flowers In  
the vases have begun to smell of human sweat. There is No more  
singing, no more dance, my mind is an old Playhouse with all its  
lights put out.  
The strong man's technique is Always the same, he serves his  
love in lethal doses, For, love is Narcissus at the water's edge,

haunted

By its own lonely face, and yet it must seek at last an end, a pure,  
total freedom, it must will the mirrors  
To shatter and the kind night to erase the water.