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## The Last Page

## Bhopal

Narayan told me about the city in India where he once studied, a literary centre known for festivals and lively debates, crowds gathering to hear the poetry readings which, he bragged, went on forever. But when he spoke the name, my face must have shifted. Yes, he said, you've heard about the gas leak. In December, clouds covered the city and its lakes. Warnings sounded and he walked uphill to find a place above the clouds, passing many who didn't know better than to take deep breaths, because the toxins left them short of breath, drawing in the yellow poison. I didn't ask who he lost among the dead. He kept apologizing, embarrassed, repeating a story I'd heard before. All he wanted to tell me, he said, was that wherever you went today it seemed like no one read anymore.

Keith Ekiss

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