

# the HARLEQUIN

*David Kirby*

## **Gandhi**

You cry easily, sure, but nothing prepares you  
for the place where Gandhi died, the bungalow,  
now a museum, where you visit his prayer room  
and bedroom and look at the case that holds  
his glasses and walking stick before  
taking the sidewalk where raised footsteps lead you to the garden

where his assassin waited. “I know the path,”  
said Gandhi. “It is straight and narrow. It is like  
the edge of the sword. I rejoice to walk on it.”  
And if you’re the only one on that path, that’s okay:  
his friend the poet Tagore says,  
“If there is none to heed your call, walk alone, walk alone.”

I love Gandhi. Who doesn’t? Well, not Hitler:  
in a letter to him, Gandhi assures the German  
leader that he doesn’t think him “the monster  
described by your opponents,” even  
though he’s responsible for “the humiliation  
of Czechoslovakia, the rape of Poland,  
and the swallowing of Denmark.” Hitler  
was probably happy to be reminded that he  
had committed those atrocities the way any bully  
likes being told that he is brutal, strong, scary,  
ruthless. At any rate,  
Hitler never replied, so let’s say, if he was not

antagonistic toward Gandhi, he was, at best, indifferent.  
For that matter, Gandhi was pretty  
indifferent to himself: he liked  
to quote the 16th-century poet Tulsidas,  
who said that religion is rooted  
in mercy, whereas egotism is embedded in the love

of the body, which we should use as a temple  
of God and not a vehicle for indulgences.  
Further, “there must be a god to worship,”  
says Gandhi, “but I have never arrogated  
myself any such claim,”  
and therefore “there can be no devotee of mine.” But

the best thing Gandhi said, ever, is “I have  
nothing new to teach the world. Truth  
and non-violence are as old as the hills.”  
He was no Buddhist, but there are statues  
of the Buddha everywhere in India  
showing him touching the fingers of one hand

to the other, and while some say the Buddha  
is counting out the Six Perfections – generosity,  
ethics, patience, and so on – I like instead  
the idea that he’s untying the knot of darkness  
and is saying, “Look, no more  
darkness! The truth has always been there; you just

couldn’t see it, and now you can.” No wonder  
the people near him hung on Gandhi’s every  
word and called him “Bapu,” which is  
the Gujarati word for “Papa.” In the garden,  
Hindi nationalist Nathuram Godse  
shoots Gandhi three times in the chest with a Beretta

9mm automatic for his liberal attitudes toward  
Muslims, pow, pow, pow, and in the chaos  
that ensues, nobody knows what to do:  
distraught, Prime Minister Nehru says,  
“Let’s go and ask Bapu what  
arrangements must be made,” and everyone bursts into

tears. And you will weep, too, when you reach  
that spot in the garden late in the day,  
in a cloak of shadow now, a brush of light  
falling over you, and a voice saying to you  
there can be good in this world,  
that none of the rest of it matters – there can be good.

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