

Sparkling water
Ormila Vijaykrishnan Prahlad

it's an hour before closing time
when you flit through the doors
a phantom in your old haunt
pretty sure no one
will recognise you
after all, twenty years have withered
since your last binge
at this watering hole.

in situations like these
you have to erase
your dead giveaway features
so you whip your still lush hair
in the teeth of a duckbill clip
bundling it further into a beanie
and wear your reading glasses
to be doubly certain
of bullet proof anonymity.

the bartender is surprisingly the same bloke
from the murky 90s
just more wizened, compassion-fatigued
by the osmosis of decades' worth
of drinkers' sagas
and it's clear from his flatlined eyes
he doesn't recognise you.

you don't know why but you fake
something that sounds
like the Queen's English
and ask for a sparkling water
cursing your irritable bowel
and the MSG in the salad at lunch
which you know is too much information
and insist on your drink
in a martini glass
which he smiles and produces
clear from his muffled chuckling
he thinks you're a middle-aged loser.

in the thinning crowd you catch a few glimpses
of wisps of your younger self—
preeners, with tumbling dark hair
waddling over their glasses
ripped denim minis and knee high boots
fishtail nose rings, kraken tattoos
the bartender handing one a tissue
while he pretends to listen
to her latest blood and thunder.

Steely Dan is warm in the air—
You go back Jack do it again
Wheel turnin' 'round and 'round
and you can't help but marvel
at how sublime the chorus sounds
when you're swimming
in sparkling water.

Ormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad is a Sydney artist, poet, and improv pianist of Indian heritage. She's a member of the North Shore Poetry Project and Authora Australis. Her recent works have been published in *Neologism*, *Nine Muses Poetry*, *Active Muse*, and several other literary journals in the US, UK, India, and Australia. Ormila regularly performs her poetry at venues in Sydney.