

LITTLE ARROW

Like a little arrow, he shot right through the scattered pile of money. The little boy, perhaps two years of age, had been running across the *gurdwara* floor. He darted from the men's side to the women's and then back, running meanwhile in wide, looping figure-eights. Sitting in the back of the *gurdwara*, I suppressed my laughs. I looked across the room to my sister and saw that she was equally amused, as were several others. Men sit on the floor on one side; women, on the other. Everyone faces the *Guru Garanth Sahib* and respectfully sits on the floor, head covered, feet not pointing toward the holy book. I don't fully understand the reasons for the custom of situating men and women on opposite sides of the room. Surely, the custom could be broken without any real consequence. It seems that sometimes a custom is so devoid of reason that there is as little reason to try to subvert it. So, the Little Arrow ran to the men's side where some fellow would attempt to catch him and the same would occur on the women's side where the Little Arrow would dodge his mother's grips. It is not that these adults were terribly slow. A churchgoer's attention is often split between the prayers at hand and one's private thoughts, the admixture becoming, at its best, an effort towards some spiritual attainment. To sit in a *gurdwara* is ordinarily a meditative, introspective, and respectful affair. This active state of peace is only ever compromised by misplaced political talk or by the doings of a child. And so the Little Arrow, admirably quick for his age, ran so gleefully—enrapturedly—possibly towards a spiritual attainment of his own. For fear of impropriety before the holy book, the adults would not pursue the Little Arrow with the clamorous effort that it appeared to require. The boy's mother could only chase him with one hand because her other hand would faithfully hold her *chuni* to her head. And on each occasion that a man would try to grasp the Little Arrow he would meanwhile direct half his sights toward the dais, on which resided the *Guru Garanth Sahib* and where the three *bhaijis* were singing hymns. The Little Arrow took advantage and was elusive for an admirable length of time. But then he shot through the pile of money that lay on the floor near the dais before which we had already bowed reverently when we first arrived. The Little Arrow shot through the zone where we are physically closest to and

most reverent of the *Guru Garanth Sahib*. It bothers me that, by appearances only, we hold respectful a pile of money even though I am well aware that the money is needed for the *gurdwara's* upkeep and is wisely spent thereof. Maybe it is its proximity to our most holy space that causes my discomfort, as if this proximity suggests a conflict of interests or that I am paying for something I shouldn't have to, paying for the proximity. Or the timing is simply bad; we place money before the dais when we first enter and bow before the book—an entrance fee of sorts. And just as the Little Arrow buzzed through the pile, leaving it in a scattered state, I smiled immediately, knowing his time was now up. Having impinged upon that barrier, the Little Arrow was caught by his mother whose *chuni* blew off her head from the tumult of her rapid two-handed effort. A man diligently assembled the money back into a pile. The mother sat the Little Arrow in her lap, and the Little Arrow turned toward us, flashing a smile, something in his way suggesting that he knows he's done something we couldn't possibly do.