

Poems by Jasmine Kaur Chandla

The Fruit of Knowing

I ate the pomegranate seeds when they weren't looking,
stained my fingers with awareness
like Holi colours that won't wash off.
Now every mirror shows a woman
With too many questions in her eyes.
I envy the sparrow who builds the same nest each season,
never wondering if there might be better ways to weave.
I watch the neighbour auntie in her doorway,
content with her mangalsutra and evening prayers,
never seeing the golden cage around her kitchen.
Some mornings, I try it on that other life like borrowed
jewellery,
heavy but familiar. I fold myself into the shapes my
grandmother knew,
press my hands into dough, not books,
speak softly when spoken to, and avoid difficult truths.
For a moment, it fits like childhood shoes.
But the fruit I've eaten grows orchards in my mind,
trees heavy with questions that keep me awake:
Why must my worth be measured in served plates?
Why does my learning threaten like thunder?
Why must I choose between being seen and being loved?
The subway advertisement shows a woman with perfect teeth,
Promising happiness comes in bottles and boxes.
I want to believe her, how simple that would be,
But my tongue tastes the difference between sweet lies and
bitter knowing.
Sometimes I stand at the crossroads of
who I was told to be and who I am becoming,
wondering which path leads home.
Both journeys seem endless,
Both roads wind through wilderness.

The university degree hangs beside wedding photos,
Theory books hide behind cookbooks,
Ambition wrestles with duty in the quiet hours.
Perhaps there is no going back to before the fruit,
No unringing of that bell,
no unseeing of patterns.
Perhaps the bliss of ignorance was never meant for me,
whose heart was always too porous to the world's pain.
At night,
When doubts crowd like monsoon clouds,
I remember:
Even Eve never asked to return to the garden.

The Lichen and I

In the shadow of Deodar trees,
where the wind carries the scent of pine and rain,
I think of us. Two beings intertwined,
like the lichen on the stones of Shimla's hills.
You, the sturdy fungi, holding us together,
offering shelter beneath your stoic arms,
and I, the tender algae, drawing light from the sun,
turning that light into life for both of us.

But this is not the fairytale they tell in temples,
nor the love songs that resonate in the valleys.
No, beneath this quiet harmony, there's a truth
that the mountains would rather not speak of.

The fungi grip too tightly,
sipping the very essence of the algae's work,
a silent hunger hidden in the folds of love.
It is a balance, they say, symbiosis.
But is it balanced if one takes more than it gives?
Is it love if the sunlight I gather,
never reaches my own roots?