Harnidh Kaur

How to Drape a Sari

Tie together loops around your waist, tight enough to bite into your soft belly (a little reminder of the diet you’re on, the thirteenth this year), tuck in one layer of silky crepe in, pressing down each inch with the same force you use to dig your nails into your palms every time you’re told to keep shut, start folding accordion folds, each as wide as half a handspan, the smaller, the better—just like you, creased into yourself because taking space looks unkempt, and rude—start wrapping the shaded purple leaves onto your body, each overlap covering up the anger you carefully pin to you chest diagonally to where your lungs lie, each breath a reminder to keep quiet, keep calm, keep still, culminating in a half-mast flag fluttering down your back, caressing your tailbone as you walk tall, accepting compliments for your cultured values, agility, and skill.
Linguaphilia

The love of languages

I'm going to murmur sonnets down your spine, as I trace words in soft, trembling cursive into your skin, invoking the poets I grew up drinking, leaving wet prints of translations that left just enough taste to make me ache for something purer than the murky trail of histories lost to the confines of colonial heritages, and I'm going to let my tongue write Hindi poetry into the flesh of your shoulder, leaving glowing words stamped into you, a code I can unscramble with the songs I hum when I play with your hair, and I'm going to weave old folk tales into your chest, pouring the fury of loss and longing that has flown for years through five rivers, together, if held distinct and separate by borders that refused to respect how the words moved together, fluid, and I'm going to press my fingers into the inner curve of your upper arm, showing you how Urdu slips like the smell of crushed petals, from my lips to yours, and I'm going to do this one by one, explaining each word I use with the texture I associate it with, for I'm going to show you how one language will not ever be enough for me to show you how much love you make me spill.
If Eve Belonged to the Sea

my heart does not know
how to beat well sometimes
it beats so fast so hard so quick
and sometimes it beats so slow
that I can time my harsh breathing with it, but it never beats in steady words, it's never stable enough to be a solid foundation
and that would be okay, I think because I've always preferred the sea's s a to the way the w y ground expects me to hold still, trapping my feet in bramble and moss, expecting uprightness from my twisted and warped bones, but it's not; it's like breathing in the way saltwater teases itself into my knotted hair, nestling against my neck, mingling with sweat, salt on salt on salt (from tears) leaked out quietly soaking through scarves tied in intricate curves and curls wrapped in themselves just like my words, withheld for the fear of the lack of ability to punctuate or control the syntax that spills out of my mouth, unbitten, unwanted, cutting through my tongue like so many bites of acid coated a p p l e s.
Would You Take Some Sugar

My chest is a teacup,
fine bone china

chipped
off
at
the
edges

by the teeth that clashed against
the porcelain cream,
leaving rose shaped bruises
people gasped over-

‘is that hand painted water colour?’—

rimmed with the thinnest line of
gold trim
scraped off by years and years
of tongues being held back
by the brim

of scalding

liquid that
poured
forth
every
time

someone tried to tip it—

hot heated crimson stained with anger, lust,
and, uncontrolled spillage of words
that mar the sheen every time they
flow through,

till the glaze is tinted
a faint yellow,
    not bright enough
to be the sun,
    and not weak enough
to live in the melancholy of sepia
tinted dreams and wants,
my heart
is the bottom
dregs left by every spill that splashed,
quietly hoarding every leaf, every drop of dirty milk, and every little omen I can read, my chest is a teacup, and it cracks every day, little rivulets escaping their little cage, the pressure of simply trying to exist, to be exploding through their embrace.

Crooked Shores

My feet are inelegant, crack-like veins protruding from translucent skin, discolored by the silverfish scars that mar the spaces that have been cut open by sharp gunmetal gleams,

my feet have no arch, I was not born with one,
you're just as obtuse as I can be, with no skill or finesse to their very being,

my toenails are wide, and flat, just like pebbles, and I trip on them in much the same way.

I've made a habit of curling them inwards every time I'm so very scared,

but when I sit by the sea,
my feet are not just feet,  
they are conduits of all that the water has  
to say to me—

my ears are overwhelmed with the  
chatter of the waves,  
and my eyes are wound up in  
the foamy sprays,  
so my feet, despite their inability,  
take up the work  
of translating the stories that  
need to be heard,  
they note down what the tiny bits  
of seaweed murmur,  
and the complaints the seashells sing,  
and they pay heed to the way  
sand finds itself nestled  
between my bones and skin,  
and I hear them all, holding court,  
letting their words wash over my feet,

*feeling the way the ground slips off under my grasp, just like these thoughts elude me.*