

Two Poems

Sonam Chhomo

Plants

Caring for plants is like caring for
old parents: tethered yet branched. My name,
like people's names, must be cut like a stem
They know the common
ones like spider, jade, tulsi, lily. The rest described by colors,
and features: elongated,
edged, smooth, polished, rough, spiky. No one messes
with another plant's origin. Even their expiries are fixed:
a certain time, a certain month, a certain season. Such
wisdom brightens their moods: burial grounds, priest,

loose clothes, no strings. Memory syncs with the
chronology of plants we touch: first those
yellow-colored flowers blanketing the neighbor's wooden
house, refusing to leave the rot years after the owners left.
s's kitchen garden ransacked by monkeys,
a's attempt at coloring my balcony with flower pots, now

only pots and soil remain. Ama's climbing sprees on plum
trees like a child thief, visits to amchi's house with bananas
in exchange for medicines he scoured from the earth, plants he
ground and stored. feeble attempts at gardening, twice in

cities with excessive heat, and staring bodies as if plants gossiped on our authenticity. y's garden colors her life like novels do for my mother: a neverland of sorts. n's dream of studying plants in the forests of Lahaul, but she chose to stay indoors, painting plants on canvases. Her kids carry her dreams now.

Faint memories of sunflowers. My excursion to the riverside with achi and acho, chewing on unknown but edible stem of a mentok, collecting chharma, and discussing the khangs that are visible to the naked eye. I become a tourist here as no leans on my ear and whispers: "Stay alert, an angry cow might chase you." My knowledge did not equal his experience. My intimacy with plants, with junipers here, are as distanced as my hold on sTod Bhoti. Holding a photograph of ama in cholu, walking on a road in Gemur while caring for two jades in my room: leftover green tea leaves, drips of water pouring carefully. Keep it alive. As long as it withstands the heat. As long as it's green.

Mixtape

There's a corner in my room dedicated to the gods, books, and guests. Ama tells us to pray to whichever god we believe in the most; we choose depending on location, time and deed. Quiet at the other end of the house, Aba sits in a yogic pose, breathing in and breathing out, replicating the buddha pose he says he just knows. The odor of the agarbattis as Ama prays signal the kitchen rituals. The doorbell rings twice. One for the maid, the other for the garbage collector. All for service or nothing survives. Drops of phenol mixed with water: swept clean. We forget the prayers that were incensed a minute ago. Out comes the aroma of oil, chopped garlic, cumin and turmeric: the usual ingredients for today. The aromas sit, persist and move around like the maid, who swiftly catches a breath of fresh air before leaving for the house next door. I can already smell the spice in the air as she opens the door. The corners are merged in aromas, forming a hybrid, unable to choose either side of the house. The next day and the coming days, the same ritual follows.